THE WOMAN-HATERS

JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

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BOOKS BY JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

The Woman-Haters

Keziah Coffin	The Depot Master
Cy Whittaker's Place	Our Village
Cap'n Eri	Mr. Pratt
Cape Cod Ballads	Partners of the Tide

The Old Home House

"'Who said I'd done anything? It's a lie.'"

[Page 44.]

THE WOMAN-HATERS

A YARN OF EASTBORO TWIN-LIGHTS

BY

JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

AUTHOR OF
"CAP'N ERI," "CY WHITTAKER'S PLACE,"
"KEZIAH COFFIN," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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TO

J. FREEMAN LINCOLN

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FOREWORD

(*By Way of Explanation*)

A STORY of mine called, like this, "The Woman-Haters," appeared recently in one of the magazines. That story was not this one, except in part —the part dealing with "John Brown" and Miss Ruth Graham. Readers of the former tale who perhaps imagine they know all about Seth Atkins and Mrs. Emeline Bascom will be surprised to find they really know so little. The truth is that, when I began to revise and rearrange the magazine story for publication as a book, new ideas came, grew, and developed. I discovered that I had been misinformed concerning the lightkeeper's past and present relations with the housekeeper at the bungalow. And there was "Bennie D." whom I had overlooked, had not mentioned at all; and that rejuvenated craft, the *Daisy M.;* and the high tide which is, or should be, talked about in Eastboro even yet; all these I had omitted for the very good

reason that I never knew of them. I have tried to be more careful this time. During the revising process "The Woman-Haters" has more than doubled in length and, let us hope, in accuracy. Even now it is, of course, not a novel, but merely a summer farce-comedy, a "yarn." And this, by the way, is all that it pretends to be.

JOSEPH C. LINCOLN.

May, 1911.

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THE WOMAN–HATERS

CHAPTER I

MR. SETH ATKINS

THE stars, like incandescent lights fed by a fast weakening dynamo, grew pale, faded, and, one by one, went out. The slate-colored sea, with its tumbling waves, changed color, becoming a light gray, then a faint blue, and, as the red sun rolled up over the edge of the eastern horizon, a brilliant sapphire, trimmed with a silver white on the shoals and along the beach at the foot of the bluff.

Seth Atkins, keeper of the Eastboro Twin-Lights, yawned, stretched, and glanced through the seaward windows of the octagon-shaped, glass-enclosed room at the top of the north tower, where he had spent the night just passed. Then he rose from his chair and extinguished the blaze in the great lantern beside him. Morning had come, the mists had rolled away, and the dots scattered along

the horizon—schooners, tugs, and coal barges, for the most part—no longer needed the glare of Eastboro Twin-Lights to warn them against close proximity to the dangerous, shoal-bordered coast. Incidentally, it was no longer necessary for Mr. Atkins to remain on watch. He drew the curtains over the polished glass and brass of the lantern, yawned again, and descended the winding iron stairs to the door at the foot of the tower, opened it and emerged into the sandy yard.

Crossing this yard, before the small white house which the government provided as a dwelling place for its lightkeepers, he opened the door of the south tower, mounted the stairs there and repeated the extinguishing process with the other lantern. Before again descending to earth, however, he stepped out on the iron balcony surrounding the light chamber and looked about him.

The view, such as it was, was extensive. To the east the open sea, the wide Atlantic, rolling lazily in the morning light, a faint breeze rippling the surfaces of the ground-swell. A few sails in sight, far out. Not a sound except the hiss and splash of the surf, which, because of a week of calms and light winds, was low even for that time of year—early June.

To the north stretched the shores of the back of the Cape. High clay bluffs, rain-washed and wrinkled, sloping sharply to the white sand of the beach a hundred feet below. Only one building, except those connected with the lighthouses, near at hand, this a small, gray-shingled bungalow about two hundred yards away, separated from the lights by the narrow stream called Clam Creek —Seth always spoke of it as the " Crick "—which, turning in behind the long surf-beaten sandspit known, for some forgotten reason, as " Black Man's Point," continued to the salt-water pond which was named " The Cove." A path led down from the lighthouses to a bend in the " Crick," and there, on a small wharf, was a shanty where Seth kept his spare lobster and eel-pots, dory sails, nets, and the like. The dory itself, with the oars in her, was moored in the cove.

A mile off, to the south, the line of bluffs was broken by another inlet, the entrance to Pounddug Slough. This poetically named channel twisted and wound tortuously inland through salt marshes and between mudbanks, widening at last to become Eastboro Back Harbor, a good-sized body of water, with the village of Eastboro at its upper end. In the old days, when Eastboro

amounted to something as a fishing port, the mackerel fleet unloaded its catch at the wharves in the Back Harbor. Then Pounddug Slough was kept thoroughly dredged and buoyed. Now it was weed-grown and neglected. Only an occasional lobsterman's dory traversed its winding ways, which the storms and tides of each succeeding winter rendered more difficult to navigate. The abandoned fish houses along its shores were falling to pieces, and at intervals the stranded hulk of a fishing sloop or a little schooner, rotting in the sun, was a dismal reminder that Eastboro's ambitious young men no longer got their living alongshore. The town itself had gone to sleep, awakening only in the summer, when the few cottagers came and the Bay Side Hotel was opened for its short season.

Behind the lighthouse buildings, to the west—and in the direction of the village—were five miles of nothing in particular. A desolate wilderness of rolling sand-dunes, beach grass, huckleberry and bayberry bushes, cedar swamps, and small clumps of pitch-pines. Through this desert the three or four rutted, crooked sand roads, leading to and from the lights, turned and twisted. Along their borders dwelt no human being; but life was

there, life in abundance. Ezra Payne, late assistant keeper at the Twin-Lights, was ready at all times to furnish evidence concerning the existence of this life.

" My godfreys domino ! " Ezra had exclaimed, after returning from a drive to Eastboro village, " I give you my word, Seth, they dummed nigh et me alive. They covered the horse all up, so that he looked for all the world like a sheep, woolly. I don't mind moskeeters in moderation, but when they roost on my eyelids and make 'em so heavy I can't open 'em, then I'm ready to swear. But I couldn't get even that relief, because every time I unbattened my mouth a million or so flew in and choked me. That's what I said—a million. Some moskeeters are fat, but these don't get a square meal often enough to be anything but hide-racks filled with cussedness. Moskeeters ! My godfreys domino ! "

Ezra was no longer assistant lightkeeper. He and his superior had quarreled two days before. The quarrel was the culmination, on Ezra's part, of a gradually developing " grouch " brought on by the loneliness of his surroundings. After a night of duty he had marched into the house, packed his belongings in a battered canvas exten-

sion case, and announced his intention of resigning from the service.

"To the everlastin' brimstone with the job!" he snarled, addressing Mr. Atkins, who, partially dressed, emerged from the bedroom in bewilderment and sleepy astonishment. "To thunder with it, I say! I've had all the gov'ment jobs I want. Life-savin' service was bad enough, trampin' the condemned beach in a howlin' no'theaster, with the sand cuttin' furrers in your face, and the icicles on your mustache so heavy you got round-shouldered luggin' 'em. But when your tramp was over, you had somebody to talk to. Here, by godfreys! there ain't nothin' nor nobody. I'm goin' fishin' again, where I can be sociable."

"Humph!" commented Seth, "you must be lonesome all to once. Ain't my company good enough for you?"

"Company! A heap of company you are! When I'm awake you're alseep and snorin' and—"

"I never snored in my life," was the indignant interruption.

"What? *You'll* snore when you're dead, and wake up the whole graveyard. Lonesome!" he continued, without giving his companion a chance to retort, "lonesome ain't no name for this place.

No company but green flies and them moskeeters, and nothin' to look at but salt water and sand and —and—dummed if I can think of anything else. Five miles from town and the only house in sight shut tight. When I come here you told me that bungalow was opened up every year——"

"So it has been till this season."

"And that picnics come here every once in a while."

"Don't expect picnickers to be such crazy loons as to come here in winter time, do you?"

"I don't know. If they're fools enough to come here *any* time, *I* wouldn't be responsible for 'em. There ain't so many moskeeters in winter. But just *look* at this hole. Just put on your specs and *look* at it! Not a man—but you—not a woman, not a child, not a girl——"

"Ah ha! ah ha! *Now* we're gettin' at it! Not a girl! That's what's the matter with you. You want to be up in the village, where you can go courtin'. You're too fur from Elsie Peters, that's where the shoe pinches. I've heard how you used to set out in her dad's backyard, with your arm round her waist, lookin' at each other, mushy as a couple of sassers of hasty-puddin'. Bah! I'll take care my next assistant ain't girl-struck."

"Girl-struck! I'd enough sight ruther be girl-struck than always ravin' and rippin' against females. And all because some woman way back in Methusalem's time had sense enough to heave you over. At least, that's what everybody cal'lates must be the reason. You pretend to be a woman-hater. All round this part of the Cape you've took pains to get up that kind of reputation; but——"

"There ain't no pretendin' about it. I've got brains enough to keep clear of petticoats. And when you get to be as old as I be and know as much as I do—though that ain't no ways likely, even if you live to be nine hundred and odd, like Noah in Scripture—you'll feel the same way."

"Aw, come off! Woman-hater! You hate women same as the boy at the poorhouse hated ice cream—'cause there ain't none around. Why, I wouldn't trust you as fur as I could see you!"

This was the end of the dialogue, because Mr. Payne was obliged to break off his harangue and dodge the stove-lifter flung at him by the outraged lightkeeper. As the lifter was about to be followed by the teakettle, Ezra took to his heels, bolted from the house and began his long tramp to the village. When he reached the first clumps

of bayberry bushes bordering the deeply rutted road, a joyful cloud of mosquitoes rose and settled about him like a fog.

So Seth Atkins was left alone to do double duty at Eastboro Twin-Lights, pending the appointment of another assistant. The two days and nights following Ezra's departure had been strenuous and provoking. Doing all the housework, preparation of meals included, tending both lights, rubbing brass work, sweeping and scouring, sleeping when he could and keeping awake when he must, nobody to talk to, nobody to help—the forty-eight hours of solitude had already convinced Mr. Atkins that the sooner a helper was provided the better. At times he even wished the disrespectful Payne back again, wished that he had soothed instead of irritated the departed one. Then he remembered certain fragments of their last conversation and wished the stove-lifter had been flung with better aim.

Now, standing on the gallery of the south tower, he was conscious of a desire for breakfast. Preparing that meal had been a part of his assistant's duties. Now he must prepare it himself, and he was hungry and sleepy. He mentally vowed that he would no longer delay notifying the authorities

of the desertion, and would urge them to hurry in sending some one to fill the vacant place.

Grumbling aloud to himself, he moved around the circle of the gallery toward the door. His hand was on the latch, when, turning, he cast another glance over the rail, this time directly downward toward the beach below. And there he saw something which caused him to forget hunger and grievances of all kinds; something which, after one horrified look to make sure, led him to dart into the light chamber, spring at a reckless gait down the winding stair, out of the tower, rush to the edge of the bluff, and plunge headlong down the zigzag path worn in the clay.

On the sand, at the foot of the bluff below the lights, just beyond reach of the wash of the surf, lay a man, or the dead body of a man, stretched at full length.

CHAPTER II

MR. JOHN BROWN

ONCE before, during his years of service as keeper of Eastboro Twin-Lights, had Seth seen such a sight as that which now caused him to make his dash for the shore. Once before, after the terrible storm of 1905, when the great steamer *Bay Queen* went down with all on board, the exact spot of her sinking unknown even to this day. Then the whole ocean side of the Cape, from Race Point to Orham, was strewn with ghastly relics. But the *Bay Queen* met her fate in the winter season, amid a gale such as even the oldest residents could not remember. Now it was early summer; the night before had been a flat calm. There had been no wreck, or the life-savers would have told him of it. There would be no excuse for a wreck, anyway.

All this, in disjointed fragments, passed through the lightkeeper's mind as he descended the path in frantic bounds and plowed through the ankle-deep

white sand of the beach. As he approached the recumbent figure he yelled a panted "Hi, there!" He did not expect the hail to be answered or even noticed. Therefore, he was pleasantly disappointed when the figure rolled over, raised itself on one elbow, looked at him in a dazed sort of way and replied cheerfully but faintly, "Hello!"

Seth stopped short, put a hand to the breast of his blue flannel shirt, and breathed a mighty sigh of relief.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed with fervor. Then, changing his labored gallop for a walk, he continued his progress toward the man, who, as if his momentary curiosity was satisfied, lay down again. He did not rise when the lightkeeper reached his side, but remained quiet, looking up from a pair of gray eyes and smiling slightly with lips that were blue. He was a stranger to Atkins, a young fellow, rather good looking, dressed in blue serge trousers, negligée shirt, blue socks, and without shoes or hat. His garments were soaked, and the salt water dripped from his shoulders to the sand. The lightkeeper stared at him, and he returned the stare.

"Gosh!" repeated Seth, after an instant of silence. "Jiminy crimps! I feel better."

"'Gosh!' repeated Seth. . . . 'Jiminy crimps! I feel better.'"

The stranger's smile broadened. "Glad to hear it, I'm sure," he said, slowly. "So do I, though there's still room for improvement. What was your particular ailment? Mine seems to have been water on the brain."

He sat up and shakily ran a hand through his wet hair as he spoke. Atkins, his surprise doubled by this extraordinary behavior, could think of nothing to say.

"Good morning," continued the young man, as if the meeting had been the most casual and ordinary possible; "I think you said a moment ago that you were feeling better. No relapse, I trust."

"Relapse? What in the world? Are you crazy? I ain't sick."

"That's good. I must have misunderstood you. Pleasant morning, isn't it?"

"Pleasant morn— Why, say! I—I—what in time are you doin', layin' there all soaked through? You scared me pretty nigh to death. I thought you was drowned, sure and sartin."

"Did you? Well, to be honest, so did I, for a while. In fact, I'm not absolutely sure that I'm not, even yet. You'll excuse me if I lie down again, won't you? I never tried a seaweed pillow before, but it isn't so bad."

He again stretched himself on the sand. Seth shook his head.

"Well, if this don't beat me!" he exclaimed. "You're the coolest critter that ever I—I——"

"I am cool," admitted the young man, with a slight shiver. "This stretch of ocean here isn't exactly a Turkish bath. I've been swimming since—well, an hour or two ago, and I am just a little chilled."

He shivered again.

"Swimmin'! An hour or two? Where on earth did you come from?"

"Oh, I fell overboard from a steamer off here somewhere. I——"

Another and emphatic shiver caused him to pause. The lightkeeper awoke to the realities of the situation.

"Good land of love!" he exclaimed. "What am I thinkin' of? Seein' you this way, and you talkin' so kind of every-day and funny drove my senses clean out, I guess. Get right up off that wet place this minute. Come up to the house, quick! Can you walk?"

"Don't know. I am willing to try. Would you mind giving me a lift?"

Seth didn't mind, which was fortunate, as his

new acquaintance couldn't have risen unaided. His knees shook under him when he stood erect, and he leaned heavily on the lightkeeper's arm.

"Steady now," counselled Atkins; "no hurry. Take it easy. If you've navigated water all alone for hours, I cal'late between us we can manage to make a five-minute cruise on dry land. . . . Even if the course we steer would make an eel lame tryin' to follow it," he added, as the castaway staggered and reeled up the beach. "Now don't try to talk. Let your tongue rest and give your feet a chance."

The climbing of the steep bluff was a struggle, but they accomplished it, and at length the stranger was seated in a chair in the kitchen.

"Now, the fust thing," observed Seth, "is to get them wet clothes off you. Usually I'd have a good fire here, but that miserable Ezry has—that is, my assistant's left me, and I have to go it alone, as you might say. So we'll get you to bed and . . . No, you can't undress yourself, neither. Set still, and I'll have you peeled in a jiffy."

His guest was making feeble efforts to remove his socks. Atkins pushed him back into the chair and stripped the blue and dripping rags from feet which were almost as blue from cold. The cast-

away attempted a weak resistance, but gave it up and said, with a whimsical smile:

"I'm mightily obliged to you. I never realized before that a valet was such a blessing. Most of mine have been confounded nuisances."

"Hey?" queried Seth, looking up.

"Nothing. Pardon me for comparing you with a valet."

"Land sakes! *I* don't care what you call me. I was out of my head once myself—typhoid fever 'twas—and they say the things I called the doctor was somethin' scandalous. You ain't responsible. You're beat out, and your brain's weak, like the rest of you. Now hold on till I get you a night-gown."

He started for the bedroom. The young man seemed a bit troubled.

"Just a minute," he observed. "Don't you think I had better move to a less conspicuous apartment? The door is open, and if any of your neighbors should happen by—any ladies, for instance, I——"

"Ladies!" Mr. Atkins regarded him frowningly. "In the fust place, there ain't a neighbor nigher'n four miles; and, in the next, I'd have you understand no women come to this house. If you

knew me better, young feller, you'd know that. Set where you be."

The nightshirt was one of the lightkeeper's own, and, although Seth was a good-sized man, it fitted the castaway almost too tightly for comfort. However, it was dry and warm and, by leaving a button or two unfastened at the neck, answered the purpose well enough. The stranger was piloted to the bedroom, assisted into the depths of a feather bed, and covered with several layers of blankets and patchwork quilts.

"There!" observed Seth, contentedly, "now you go to sleep. If you get to sweatin', so much the better. 'Twill get some of that cold water out of you. So long!"

He departed, closing the door after him. Then he built a fire in the range, got breakfast, ate it, washed the dishes and continued his forenoon's work. Not a sound from the bedroom. Evidently the strange arrival had taken the advice concerning going to sleep. But all the time he was washing dishes, rubbing brass work or sweeping, Mr. Atkins's mind was busy with the puzzle which fate had handed him. Occasionally he chuckled, and often he shook his head. He could make nothing out of it. One thing only was certain—he had

never before met a human being exactly like this specimen.

It was half past twelve before there were signs of life in the bedroom. Seth was setting the table for dinner, when the door of the room opened a little way, and a voice said:

"I say, are you there?"

"I be. What do you want?"

"Would you mind telling me what you've done with my clothes?"

"Not a bit. I've got 'em out on the line, and they ain't dry yet. If you'll look on the chair by the sou'west window you'll find a rig-out of mine. I'm afraid 'twill fit you too quick—you're such an elephant—but I'll risk it if you will."

Apparently the stranger was willing to risk it, for in a few moments he appeared, dressed in the Atkins Sunday suit of blue cloth, and with Seth's pet carpet slippers on his feet.

"Hello!" was the lightkeeper's greeting. "How you feelin'?—better?"

"Tip top, thank you. Where do you wash, when it's necessary?"

"Basin right there in the sink. Soap in the becket over top of it. Roller towel on the closet door. Ain't you had water enough for a spell?"

"Not fresh water, thank you. I'm caked with salt from head to foot."

"Does make a feller feel like a split herrin', if he ain't used to it. Think you can eat anything?"

"Can I?" The response was enthusiastic. "You watch me! My last meal was yesterday noon."

"Yesterday *noon!* Didn't you eat no supper?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well, I—well, to be frank, because I hadn't the price. It took my last cent to pay my fare on that blessed steamer."

"Great land of love! What time was it when you fell overboard?"

"Oh, I don't know. Two o'clock, perhaps."

"Two o'clock! What was you doin' up at two o'clock? Why wasn't you in your stateroom asleep?"

"I hadn't any stateroom. Staterooms cost money."

"My soul! And you swum three hours on an empty stomach?"

"Not altogether. Part of it on my back. But, if you'll excuse familiarity on short acquaintance, those things you're cooking smell good to me."

"Them's clam fritters, and, if *you'll* excuse my sayin' so that shouldn't, they *are* good. Set down and fill up."

The visitor ate nine of the fritters, a slice of dried-apple pie, and drank two cups of coffee. Seth, between intervals of frying and eating, watched him with tremendous curiosity and as much patience as he could muster. When the pie was finished he asked the first of the questions with which he had been bursting all the forenoon.

"Tell me," he said, "how'd you come to fall overboard?"

"I'm not very certain just how it happened. I remember leaning over the rail and watching the waves. Then I was very dizzy all at once. The next thing I knew I was in the water."

"Dizzy, hey? Seasick, may be."

"I guess not. I'm a pretty good sailor. I'm inclined to think the cause was that empty stomach you mentioned."

"Um-hm. You didn't have no supper. Still, you ate the noon afore."

"Not much. Only a sandwich."

"A sandwich! What did you have for breakfast?"

"Well, the fact is, I overslept and decided to omit the breakfast."

"Gosh! no wonder you got dizzy. If I went without meals for a whole day I cal'late I'd be worse than dizzy. What did you do when you found yourself in the water?"

"Yelled at first, but no one heard me. Then I saw some lights off in this direction and started to swim for them. I made the shore finally, but I was so used up that I don't remember anything after the landing. Think I took a nap."

"I presume likely. Wonder 'twasn't your everlastin' nap! Tut! tut! tut! Think of it!"

"I don't want to, thank you. It isn't pleasant enough to think of. I'm here and—by the way, where *is* here?"

"This is Eastboro township—Eastboro, Cape Cod. Them lights out there are Eastboro Twin-Lights. I'm the keeper of 'em. My name's Atkins, Seth Atkins."

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Atkins. And tremendously obliged to you, besides."

"You needn't be. I ain't done nothin'. Let me see, you said your name was——"

"Did I?" The young man seemed startled, almost alarmed. "When?"

Seth was embarrassed, but not much. "Well," he admitted, "I don't know's you did say it, come to think of it. What *is* your name?"

"My name?"

"Yes."

"Oh, why—my name is Brown—er—John Brown. Not the gentleman who was hanged, of course; distant relative, that's all."

"Hum! John Brown, hey? What steamer did you fall off of?"

"Why—why—I can't seem to remember. That's odd, isn't it?"

"Yes, I should say 'twas. Where was she bound?"

"Bound? Oh, you mean where was she going?"

"Sartin."

"I think—I think she was going to—to. . . . Humph! how strange this is!"

"What?"

"Why, that I should forget all these things."

The lightkeeper regarded his guest with suspicion.

"Yaas," he drawled slowly, "when you call it strange you ain't exaggeratin' none wuth mentionin'. I s'pose," he added, after a moment, during

which he stared intently at Mr. Brown, who smiled in polite acknowledgment of the stare; "I s'pose likely you couldn't possibly remember what port you hailed from?"

"I suppose not," was the calm reply.

Seth rose from the table.

"Well," he observed, "I've been up all night, too, and it's past my bedtime. As I told you, my assistant's left all of a sudden and I'm alone in charge of gov'ment property. I ought to turn in, but—" he hesitated.

John Brown also rose.

"Mr. Atkins," he said, "my memory seems to be pretty bad, but I haven't forgotten everything. For instance," his smile disappeared, and his tone became earnest, "I can remember perfectly well that I'm not a crook, that I haven't done anything to be ashamed of—as I see it—that I'm very grateful to you, and that I don't steal. If you care to believe that and, also, that, being neither a sneak or a thief, I sha'n't clear out with the spoons while you're asleep, you might—well, you might risk turning in."

The lightkeeper did not answer immediately. The pair looked each other straight in the eye.

Then Seth yawned and turned toward the bedroom.

"I'll risk it," he said, curtly. "If I ain't awake by six o'clock I wish you'd call me. You'll find some spare clay pipes and tobacco on the mantelpiece by the clock. So long."

He entered the bedroom and closed the door. Mr. Brown stepped over to the mantel and helped himself to a pipe.

CHAPTER III

MR. BROWN PUTS IN AN APPLICATION

AT half past five the lightkeeper opened the bedroom door and peeped out. The kitchen was empty. There was no sign of Mr. Brown. It took Seth just four minutes to climb into the garments he had discarded and reach the open air. His guest was seated on the bench beside the house, one of the clay pipes in his hand. He was looking out to sea. He spoke first:

"Hello!" he said. "You're up ahead of time, aren't you? It isn't six yet."

Atkins grinned. "No," he answered, "'tain't! not quite. But sence Ezry cleared out I've been a kind of human alarm clock, as you might say. Feelin' all right, are you?"

"Yes, thank you. I say," holding up the pipe and regarding it respectfully, "is this tobacco of yours furnished by the government?"

"No. Some I bought myself last time I was over to the Center. Why, what's the matter with it? Ain't it good?"

"Perhaps so."

"Then what made you ask? Ain't it strong enough?"

"Strong enough! You're disposed to be sarcastic. It's stronger than I am. What do they flavor it with—tar?"

"Say, let's see that plug. *That* ain't smokin' tobacco."

"What is it, then—asphalt?"

"Why, haw! haw! That's a piece of Ezry's chewin'. Some he left when he went away. It's 'Honest Friend.' *'Tis* flavored up consider'ble. And you tried to smoke it! Ho! ho!"

The young man joined in the laugh.

"That explains why it bubbled so," he said. "I used twenty-two matches, by actual count, and then gave it up. Bah!" he smacked his lips disgustedly and made a face: "'Honest Friend'—is that the name of it? Meaning that it'll stick to you through life, I presume. Water has no effect on the taste; I've tried it."

"Maybe some supper might help. I'll wash the dinner dishes and start gettin' it. All there

seems to be to this job of mine just now is washin' dishes. And how I hate it!"

He reëntered the kitchen. Then he uttered an exclamation:

"Why, what's become of the dishes?" he demanded. "I left 'em here on the table."

Brown arose from the bench and sauntered to the door.

"I washed them," he said. "I judged that you would have to if I didn't, and it seemed the least I could do, everything considered."

"Sho! You washed the dishes, hey? Where'd you put 'em?"

"In the closet there. That's where they belong, isn't it?"

Seth went to the closet, took a plate from the pile and inspected it.

"Um!" he grunted, turning the plate over, "that ain't such a bad job. Not so all-fired bad, for a green hand. What did you wash 'em with?"

"A cloth I found hanging by the sink."

"I see. Yes, yes. And you wiped 'em on—what?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I didn't see any towels in sight, except that one on the door; and,

for various reasons, I judged that wasn't a dish towel."

"Good judgment. 'Tisn't. Go on."

"So I hunted around, and in the closet in the parlor, or living room, or whatever you call it, I found a whole stack of things that looked like towels; so I used one of those."

"Is this it?" Seth picked up a damp and bedraggled cloth from the table.

"That's it. I should have hung it up somewhere, I suppose. I'll lose my job if I don't look out."

"Um! Well, I'm much obliged to you, only——"

"Only?"

"Only you washed them dishes with the sink cloth and wiped 'em with a piller case."

The volunteer dishwasher's mouth opened.

"*No!*" he gasped.

"Ya-as."

"A pillow case! Well, by George!"

"Um-hm. I jedge you ain't washed many dishes in your lifetime."

"Not so very many. No."

They looked at each other and burst into a roar of laughter. Brown was the first to recover.

"Well," he observed, "I guess it's up to me. If you'll kindly put me next to a genuine cloth, or sponge, or whatever is the proper caper for dish-washing, I'll undertake to do them over again. And, for heaven's sake, lock up the pillow cases."

Seth protested, declaring that the dishes need not be rewashed that very minute, and that when he got a chance he would do them himself. But the young man was firm, and, at last, the lightkeeper yielded.

"It's real kind of you," he declared, "and bein' as I've consider'ble to do, I don't know but I'll let you. Here's a couple of dishcloths, and there's the towels. I'm goin' out to see to the lights, and I'll be back pretty soon and get supper."

Later in the evening, after supper, the housework done, they sat again on the bench beside the door, each with a pipe, filled, this time, with genuine smoking tobacco. Before and below them was the quiet sea, rolling lazily under the stars. Overhead the big lanterns in the towers thrust their parallel lances of light afar into the darkness. The only sounds were the low wash of the surf and the hum of the eager mosquitoes. Brown was silent, alternately puffing at the pipe and slapping at the insects, which latter, apparently finding his skin eas-

ier to puncture than that of the tanned and leathery Atkins, were making the most of their opportunity.

Seth, whose curiosity had been checked but not smothered by his companion's evident desire to say nothing concerning himself, was busy thinking of various guileful schemes with which to entrap the castaway into the disclosure of his identity. Having prepared his bait, he proceeded to get over a line.

"Mr. Brown," he said, "I ain't mentioned it to you afore, 'count of your needin' rest and grub and all after your fallin' overboard last night. But tomorrer you'll be feelin' fustrate again, and I cal'late you'll be wantin' to get word to your folks. Now we can telephone to the Eastboro depot, where there's a telegraph, and the depot master'll send a dispatch to your people, lettin' 'em know you're all safe and sound. If you'll just give me the address and what you want to say, I'll 'tend to it myself. The depot master's a good friend of mine, and he'll risk sending the dispatch 'collect' if I tell him to."

"Thank you," replied Brown, shortly.

"Oh, don't mention it. Now who'll I send it to?"

"You needn't send it. I couldn't think of putting you to further trouble."

"Trouble! 'Tain't no trouble to telephone. Land sakes, I do it four or five times a day. Now who'll I send it to?"

"You needn't send it."

"Oh, well, of course, if you'd ruther send it yourself——"

"I sha'n't send it. It really isn't worth while 'phoning or telegraphing either. I didn't drown, and I'm very comfortable, thank you—or should be if it weren't for these mosquitoes."

"Comf'table! Yes, you're comf'table, but how about your folks? Won't they learn, soon's that steamer gets into—into Portland—or—or—New York or Boston—or . . . Hey?"

"I didn't speak."

Seth swallowed hard and continued. "Well, wherever she was bound," he snapped. "Won't they learn that you sot sail in her and never got there? Then they'll know that you *must* have fell overboard."

John Brown drew a mouthful of smoke through the stem of the pipe and blew it spitefully among the mosquitoes.

"I don't see how they'll learn it," he replied.

"Why, the steamer folks'll wire 'em right off."

"They'll have to find them first."

"That'll be easy enough. There'll be your name, 'John Brown,' of such and such a place, written right on the purser's book, won't it."

"No," drawled Mr. Brown, "it won't."

The lightkeeper felt very much as if this particular road to the truth had ended suddenly in a blind alley. He pulled viciously at his chin whiskers. His companion shifted his position on the bench. Silence fell again, as much silence as the mosquitoes would permit.

Suddenly Brown seemed to reach a determination.

"Atkins," he said briskly, and with considerable bitterness in his tone, "don't you worry about my people. They don't know where I am, and—well, some of them, at least, don't care. Maybe I'm a rolling stone—at any rate, I haven't gathered any moss, any financial moss. I'm broke. I haven't any friends, any that I wish to remember; I haven't any job. I am what you might call down and out. If I had drowned when I fell overboard last night, it might have been a good thing—or it might not. We won't argue the question, because just now I'm

ready to take either side. But let's talk about yourself. You're lightkeeper here?"

"I be, yes."

"And these particular lights seem to be a good way from everywhere and everybody."

"Five mile from Eastboro Center, sixteen from Denboro, and two from the nighest life savin' station. Why?"

"Oh, just for instance. No neighbors, you said?"

"Nary one."

"I noticed a bungalow just across the brook here. It seems to be shut up. Who owns it?"

"Bunga—which? Oh, that cottage over on t'other side the crick? That b'longs to a couple of paintin' fellers from up Boston way. Not house painters, you understand, but fellers that put in their time paintin' pictures of the water and the beach and the like of that. Seems a pretty silly job for grown-up men, but they're real pleasant and folksy. Don't put on no airs nor nothin.' They're most gen'rally here every June and July and August, but I understand they ain't comin' this year, so the cottage'll be shut up. I'll miss 'em, kind of. One of 'em's name is Graham and t'other's Hamilton."

"I see. Many visitors to the lights?"

"Not many. Once in a while a picnic comes over in a livery four-seater, but not often. The same gang never comes twice. Road's too bad, and they complain like fury about the moskeeters."

"Do they? How peevish! Atkins, you're not married?"

It was an innocent question, but it had an astonishing effect. The lightkeeper bounced on the bench as if someone had kicked it violently from beneath.

"What?" he quavered shrilly. "Wha—what's that?"

Brown was surprised. "I asked if you were married, that's all," he said. "I can't see——"

"Stop!" Seth's voice shook, and he bent down to glare through the darkness at his companion's face. "Stop!" he ordered. "You asked me if I was—married?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't I?"

"Why shouldn't you? See here, young feller, you—you—what made you ask that?"

"What made me?"

"Stop sayin' my words after me. Are you a man or a poll-parrot? Can't you understand plain United States language? What made you? Or

who made you? Who told you to ask me that question?"

He pounded the bench with his fist. The pair stared at each other for a moment; then Brown leaned back and began to whistle. Seth seized him by the shoulders.

"Quit that foolishness, d'you hear?" he snarled. "Quit it, and answer me!"

The answer was prefaced by a pitying shake of the head.

"It's the mosquitoes," observed the young man, musingly. "They get through and puncture the brain after a time, I presume. I'm not surprised exactly, but," with a sigh, "I'm very sorry."

"What are you talkin' about," demanded Atkins. "Be you crazy?"

"No-o. *I'm* not."

"*You're* not! Do you mean that I am?"

"Well," slowly, "I'm not an expert in such cases, but when a perfectly simple, commonplace question sets a chap to pounding and screaming and offering violence, then—well, it's either insanity or an attempt at insult, one or the other. I've given you the benefit of the doubt."

He scratched a match on his heel and relit

his pipe. The lightkeeper still stared, suspicious and puzzled. Then he drew a long breath.

"I—I didn't mean to insult you," he stammered.

"Glad to hear it, I'm sure. If I were you, however, I should see a doctor for the other trouble."

"And I ain't crazy, neither. I beg your pardon for hollerin' and grabbin' hold of you."

"Granted."

"Thank ye. Now," hesitatingly, "would you mind tellin' me why you asked me if I was married?"

"Not in the least. I asked merely because it occurred to me that you might be. Of course, I had seen nothing of your wife, but it was barely possible that she was away on a visit, or somewhere. There is no regulation forbidding lightkeepers marrying—at least, I never heard of any—and so I asked; that's all."

Seth nodded. "I see," he said, slowly; "yes, yes, I see. So you didn't have no special reason."

"I did not. Of course, if I had realized that you were subject to—er—fits, I should have been more careful."

"Hum! . . . Well, I—I beg your pardon again. I—I am kind of touchy on some p'ints.

Didn't I tell you no women came here? Married! A wife! Do I look like a dum fool?"

"Not now."

"Well, then! And I've apologized for bein' one a few minutes ago, ain't I."

"Yes, you have. No grudge on my part, I assure you. Let's forget it and talk of something else."

They did, but the dialogue was rather jerky. Brown was thinking, and Atkins seemed moody and disinclined to talk. After a time he announced that it was getting late and he cal'lated he would go up to the light room. "You'd better turn in," he added, rising.

"Just a minute," said the young man. "Wait just a minute. Atkins, suppose I asked you another question—would you become violent at once? or merely by degrees?"

Seth frowned. The suspicious look returned to his face.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Depended on what you asked me, maybe."

"Yes. Well, this one is harmless—at least, I hope it is. I thought the other was, also, but I . . . There! there! be calm. Sit down again and listen. This question is nothing like that. It's

about that assistant of yours, the chap who left a day or two before I drifted in. What were his duties? What did he have to do when he was here?"

"Wa-al," drawled Seth with sarcasm, resuming his seat on the bench; "he was *supposed* to do consider'ble many things. Stand watch and watch with me, and scrub brass and clean up around, and sweep and wash dishes and—and—well, make himself gen'rally useful. Them was the duties he was supposed to have. What he done was dif-f'rent. Pesky loafer! Why?"

"That's what I'm going to tell you. Have they appointed his successor yet? Have you got any one to take his place?"

"No. Fact is, I'd ought to have telegraphed right off to the Board, but I ain't. I was so glad to see the last of him that I kept puttin' it off. I'll do it tomorrer."

"Perhaps you won't need to."

"Course I'll need to! Why not? Got to have somebody to help. That's rules and regulations; and, besides, I can't keep awake day and night, too. What makes you think I won't need to?"

The young man knocked the ashes from his pipe. Rising, he laid a hand on his companion's shoulder.

"Because you've got an assistant right here on the premises," he said. "Delivered by the Atlantic express right at your door. Far be it from me to toot my horn, Mr. Atkins, or to proclaim my merits from the housetops. But, speaking as one discerning person to another, when it comes to an A1, first chop lightkeeper's assistant, I ask: 'What's the matter with yours truly, John Brown?'"

Seth's reply was not in words. The hand holding his pipe fell limp upon his lap, and he stared at the speaker. The latter, entirely unabashed, waved an airy gesture, and continued.

"I repeat," he said, "'What's the matter with John Brown?' And echo answers, 'He's all right!' I am a candidate for the position of assistant keeper at Eastboro Twin-Lights."

"*You?*"

"Me."

"But—but—aw, go on! You're foolin'."

"Not a fool. I mean it. I am here. I'm green, but in the sunshine of your experience I agree to ripen rapidly. I can wash dishes—you've seen me. I believe I could scrub brass and sweep."

"You wantin' to be assistant at a place like this!

You! an edicated, able young chap, that's been used to valets and servants and——"

"Why do you say that? How do you know I've been used to those things?"

"'Cause, as I hinted to you a spell ago, I ain't altogether a dum fool. I can put two and two together and make four, without having the example done for me on a blackboard. You're a rich man's son; you've been used to sassiety and city ways and good clothes. *You* wantin' to put in your days and nights in a forsaken hole like this! Nonsense! Get out!"

But Mr. Brown refused to get out.

"No nonsense about it," he declared. "It is the hand of Fate. With the whole broadside of Cape Cod to land upon, why was I washed ashore just at this particular spot? Answer:—Because at this spot, at this time, Eastboro Twin-Lights needed an assistant keeper. I like the spot. It is beautiful. 'Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife.' With your permission, I'll stay here. The leopard may or may not change his spots, but I sha'n't. I like this one and here I stay. Yes, I mean it. I stay—as your assistant. Come, what do you say? Is it a go?"

The lightkeeper rose once more. "I'm goin' on

watch," he said with decision. "You turn in. You'll feel better in the mornin'."

He started towards the tower. But John Brown sprang from the bench and followed him.

"Not until you've answered my question," he declared. "*Am* I to be your assistant?"

"No, course you ain't. It's dum foolishness. Besides, I ain't got the say; the government hires its own keepers."

"But you can square the government. That will be easy. Why," with a modest gesture, "look what the government is getting. It will jump at the chance. Atkins, you must say yes."

"I sha'n't, neither. Let go of my arm. It's blame foolishness, I tell you. Why," impatiently, "course it's foolishness! I don't know the first thing about you."

"What of it? I don't know anything about you, either."

Again the lightkeeper seemed unaccountably agitated. He stopped in his stride and whirled to face his companion.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded fiercely. Before the young man could reply, he turned again, strode to the door of the light, flung

it open, and disappeared within. The door closed behind him with a thunderous bang.

John Brown gazed after him in bewilderment. Then he shrugged his shoulders and returned to the bench.

The surf at the foot of the bluff grumbled and chuckled wickedly, as if it knew all of poor humanity's secrets and found a cynic's enjoyment in the knowledge.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF JOB

THE next morning Seth was gloomy and uncommunicative. At the breakfast table, when Brown glanced up from his plate, he several times caught the lightkeeper looking intently at him with the distrustful, half-suspicious gaze of the night before. Though quite aware of this scrutiny, he made no comment upon it until the meal was nearly over; then he observed suddenly:

"It's all right; you needn't."

"Needn't what?" demanded Atkins, in astonishment.

"Look at me as if you expected me to explode at any minute. I sha'n't. I'm not loaded."

Seth colored, under his coat of sunburn, and seemed embarrassed.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," he stammered. "Have the moskeeters affected *your* brains?"

"No. My brains, such as they are, are all right, and I want to keep them so. That's why I request you not to look at me in that way."

"How was I lookin' at you? I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do. You are wondering how much I know. I don't know anything and I'm not curious. That's the truth. Now why not let it go at that?"

"See here, young feller, I——"

"No; you see here. I'm not an Old Sleuth; I haven't any ambitions that way. I don't know anything about you—what you've been, what you've done——"

"Done!" Seth leaned across the table so suddenly that he upset his chair. "Done?" he cried; "what do you mean by that? Who said I'd done anything? It's a lie."

"What is a lie?"

"Why—why—er—whatever they said!"

"Who said?"

"Why, the ones that—that said what you said they said."

"I didn't say anyone had said anything."

"Then what do you mean by—by hintin'? Hey? What do you mean by it?"

He brandished a clenched fist over the breakfast dishes. Brown leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"Call me when the patient recovers his senses," he drawled wearily. "This delirium is painful to a sensitive nature."

Atkins's fist wavered in mid-air, opened, and was drawn across its owner's forehead.

"Well, by jiminy!" exclaimed the lightkeeper with emphasis, "this is—is— . . . I guess I *be* crazy. If I ain't, you are. Would you mind tellin' me what in time you mean by *that?*"

"It is not the mosquitoes," continued his companion, in apparent soliloquy; "there are no mosquitoes at present. It must be the other thing, of course. But so early in the morning, and so violent. Alcohol is——"

"*Shut up!*" It was not a request, but an order. Brown opened his eyes.

"You were addressing me?" he asked, blandly. "Yes?"

"Addressin' you! For thunder sakes, who else would I be ad— . . . There! there! Now I cal'late you're hintin' that I'm drunk. I ain't."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed. And I ain't out of my head—

not yet; though keepin' company with a Bedlamite may have some effect, I shouldn't wonder. Mr. John Brown—if that's your name, which I doubt —you listen to me."

"Very well, Mr. Seth Atkins—if that is your name, which I neither doubt nor believe, not being particularly interested—I'm listening. Proceed."

"You told me last night that you wanted the job of assistant keeper here at these lights. Course you didn't mean it."

"I did."

"You *did!* . . . Well, *you* must be drunk or loony."

"I'm neither. And I meant it. I want the job."

Seth looked at him, and he looked at Seth. At length the lightkeeper spoke again.

"Well," he said, slowly, "I don't understand it at all, but never mind. Whatever happens, we've got to understand each other. Mind I don't say the job's yours, even if we do; but we can't even think of it unless we understand each other plain. To begin with, I want to tell you that I ain't done nothin' that's crooked, nor wicked, nor nothin' but what I think is right

and what I'd do over again. Do you believe that?"

"Certainly. As I told you, I'm not interested, but I'll believe it with pleasure if you wish me to."

"I don't wish nothin'. You've *got* to believe it. And whether you stay here ten minutes or ten years you've got to mind your own business. I won't have any hints or questions about me—from you nor nobody else. 'Mind your own business,' that's the motto of Eastboro Twin-Lights, while I'm boss of 'em. If you don't like it—well, the village is only five mile off, and I'll p'int out the road to you."

He delivered this ultimatum with extraordinary energy. Then he reached for his overturned chair, set it on its legs, and threw himself into it. "Well," he demanded, after a moment; "what do you say to that?"

"Hurrah!" replied Mr. Brown cheerfully.

"Hurrah? For the land sakes! . . . Say, *can't* you talk sensible, if you try real hard and set your mind to it? What is there to hurrah about?"

"Everything. The whole situation. Atkins," Brown leaned forward now and spoke with earnestness, "I like your motto. It suits me. 'Mind your own business' suits me down to the ground.

It proves that you and I were made to work together in a place just like this."

"Does, hey? I want to know!"

"You do know. Why, just think: each of us has pleaded 'not guilty.' We've done nothing—we're entirely innocent—and we want to forget it. I agree not to ask you how old you are, nor why you wear your brand of whiskers, nor how you like them, nor—nor anything. I agree not to ask questions at all."

"Humph! but you asked some last night."

"Purely by accident. You didn't answer them. You asked me some, also, if you will remember, and I didn't answer them, either. Good! We forget everything and agree not to do it again."

"Ugh! I tell you I ain't done nothin'."

"I know. Neither have I. Let the dead past be its own undertaker, so far as we are concerned. I'm honest, Atkins, and tolerably straight. I believe you are; I really do. But we don't care to talk about ourselves, that's all. And, fortunately, kind Providence has brought us together in a place where there's no one else *to* talk. I like you, I credit you with good taste; therefore, you must like me."

"Hey? Ho, ho!" Seth laughed, in spite of

himself. "Young man," he observed, "you ain't cultivated your modesty under glass, have you?"

Brown smiled. "Joking aside," he said, "I don't see why I shouldn't, in time, make an ideal assistant lightkeeper. Give me a trial, at any rate. I need an employer; you need a helper. Here we both are. Come; it is a bargain, isn't it? Any brass to be scrubbed—boss?"

Of course, had Eastboro Twin-Lights been an important station, the possibility of John Brown's remaining there would have been nonexistent. If it had been winter, or even early spring or fall, a regular assistant would have been appointed at once, and the castaway given his walking papers. If Seth Atkins had not been Seth Atkins, particular friend of the district superintendent, matters might have been different. But the Eastboro lights were unimportant, merely a half-way mark between Orham on the one hand and the powerful Seaboard Heights beacon on the other. It was the beginning of summer, when wrecks almost never occurred. And the superintendent liked Seth, and Seth liked him. So, although Mr. Atkins still scoffed at his guest's becoming a permanent fixture at the lights, and merely consented, after more parley, to see if

he couldn't arrange for him to "hang around and help a spell until somebody else was sent," the conversation with the superintendent over the long distance 'phone resulted more favorably for Brown than that nonchalant young gentleman had a reasonable right to expect.

"The Lord knows who I can send you now, Atkins!" said the superintendent. "I can't think of a man anywhere that can be spared. If you can get on for a day or two longer, I'll try to get a helper down! but where he's coming from I don't see."

Then Seth sprung the news that he had a "sort of helper" already. "He's a likely young chap enough," admitted the lightkeeper, whispering the words into the transmitter, in order that the "likely young chap" might not hear; "but he's purty green yet. He wants the reg'lar job and, give me time enough, I cal'late I can break him in. Yes, I'm pretty sure I can. And it's the off season, so there really ain't no danger. In a month he'd be doin' fust-rate."

"Who is he? Where did he come from?" asked the superintendent.

"Name's Brown. He come from—from off here a ways," was the strictly truthful answer. "He used to be on a steamboat."

"All right. If you'll take a share of the responsibility, I'll take the rest. And, as soon as I can, I'll send you a regular man."

"I can't pay you no steady wages," Seth explained to his new helper. "Salaries come from the gov'ment, and, until they say so, I ain't got no right to do it. And I can't let you monkey with the lights, except to clean up around and such. If you want to stay a spell, until an assistant's ap-p'inted, I'll undertake to be responsible for your keep. And if you need some new shoes or stockin's or a cap, or the like of that, I'll see you get 'em. Further'n that I can't go yet. It's a pretty poor job for a fellow like you, and if *I* was you I wouldn't take it."

"Oh, yes, you would," replied Brown, with conviction. "If you were I, you would take it with bells on. Others may yearn for the strenuous life, but not your humble servant. As for me, I stay here and 'clean up around.'"

And stay he did, performing the cleaning up and other duties with unexpected success and zeal. Atkins, for the first day or two, watched him intently, being still a trifle suspicious and fearful of his "substitute assistant." But as time passed and the latter asked no more questions, seemed not in the

least curious concerning his superior, and remained the same cool, easy-going, cheerful individual whom Seth had found asleep on the beach, the lightkeeper's suspicions were ended. It was true that Brown was as mysterious and secretive as ever concerning his own past, but that had been a part of their bargain. Atkins, who prided himself on being a judge of human nature, decided that his helper was a young gentleman in trouble, but that the trouble, whatever it might be, involved nothing criminal or dishonest. That he was a gentleman, he was sure—his bearing and manner proved that; but he was a gentleman who did not "put on airs." Not that there was any reason why he should put on airs, but, so far as that was concerned, there was no apparent reason for the monumental conceit and condescension of some of the inflated city boarders in the village. Brown was not like those people at all.

Seth had taken a fancy to him at their first meeting. Now his liking steadily increased. Companionship in a lonely spot like Eastboro Twin-Lights is a test of a man's temper. Brown stood the test well. If he made mistakes in the work—and he did make some ridiculous ones—he cheerfully undid them when they were pointed out to him. He

was, for the most part, good-natured and willing to talk, though there were periods when he seemed depressed and wandered off by himself along the beach or sat by the edge of the bluff, staring out to sea. The lightkeeper made no comment on this trait in his character. It helped to confirm his own judgment concerning the young fellow's trouble. People in trouble were subject to fits of the "blues," and during these fits they liked to be alone. Seth knew this from his own experience. There were times when he, too, sought solitude.

He trusted his helper more and more. He did not, of course, permit him to take the night watch in the lights, but he did trust him to the extent of leaving him alone for a whole afternoon while he drove the old horse, attached to the antique "open wagon"—both steed and vehicle a part of the government property—over to Eastboro to purchase tobacco and newspapers at the store. On his return he found everything as it should be, and this test led him to make others, each of which was successful in proving John Brown faithful over a few things and, therefore, in time, to be intrusted with many and more important ones.

Brown, on his part, liked Seth. He had professed to like him during the conversation at the

breakfast table which resulted in his remaining at the lights, but then he was not entirely serious. He was, of course, grateful for the kindness shown him by the odd longshoreman and enjoyed the latter's society and droll remarks as he would have enjoyed anything out of the ordinary and quaintly amusing. But now he really liked the man. Seth Atkins was a countryman, and a marked contrast to any individual Brown had ever met, but he was far from being a fool. He possessed a fund of dry common sense, and his comments on people and happenings in the world—a knowledge of which he derived from the newspapers and magazines obtained on his trips to Eastboro—were a constant delight. And, more than all, he respected his companion's desire to remain a mystery. Brown decided that Atkins was, as he had jokingly called him, a man with a past. What that past might be, he did not know or try to learn. " Mind your own business," Seth had declared to be the motto of Eastboro Twin-Lights, and that motto suited both parties to the agreement.

The lightkeeper stood watch in the tower at night. During most of the day he slept; but, after the first week was over, and his trust in his helper became more firm, he developed the habit of rising

at two in the afternoon, eating a breakfast—or dinner, or whatever the meal might be called—and wandering off along the crooked road leading south and in the direction of Pounddug Slough. The road, little used and grass grown, twisted and turned amid the dunes until it disappeared in a distant grove of scrub oaks and pitch pines. Each afternoon—except on Sundays and on the occasions of his excursions to the village—Atkins would rise from the table, saunter to the door to look at the weather, and then, without excuse or explanation, start slowly down the road. For the first hundred yards he sauntered, then the saunter became a brisk walk, and when he reached the edge of the grove he was hurrying almost at a dog trot. Sometimes he carried a burden with him, a brown paper parcel brought from Eastboro, a hammer, a saw, or a coil of rope. Once he descended to the boathouse at the foot of the bluff by the inlet and emerged bearing a big bundle of canvas, apparently an old sail; this he arranged, with some difficulty, on his shoulder and stumbled up the slope, past the corner of the house and away toward the grove. Brown watched him wonderingly. Where was he going, and why? What was the mysterious destination of all these tools and old junk? Where did Seth

spend his afternoons and why, when he returned, did his hands and clothes smell of tar? The substitute assistant was puzzled, but he asked no questions. And Seth volunteered no solution of the puzzle.

Yet the solution came, and in an unexpected way. Seth drove to the village one afternoon and returned with literature, smoking materials and an announcement. The latter he made during supper.

"I tried to buy that fly paper we wanted today," he observed, as a preliminary. "Couldn't get none. All out."

"But will have some in very shortly, I presume," suggested the assistant, who knew the idiosyncrasies of country stores.

"Oh, yes, sartin! Expectin' it every minute. That store's got a consider'ble sight more expectations in it than it has anything else. They're always six months ahead of the season or behind it in that store. When it's so cold that the snow birds get chilblains they'll have the shelves chuck full of fly paper. Now, when it's hotter than a kittle of pepper tea, the bulk of their stock is ice picks and mittens. Bah! However, they're goin' to send the fly paper over when it comes, along with the dog."

"The dog?" repeated Brown in amazement.

"Yup. That's what I was goin' to tell you—about the dog. I ordered a dog today. Didn't pay nothin' for him, you understand. Henry G., the storekeeper, gave him to me. The boy'll fetch him down when he fetches the fly paper."

"A dog? We're—you're going to keep a dog—here?"

"Sure thing. Why not? Got room enough to keep a whole zoölogical menagerie if we wanted to, ain't we? Besides, a dog'll be handy to have around. Bill Foster, the life saver, told me that somebody busted into the station henhouse one night a week ago and got away with four of their likeliest pullets. He cal'lates 'twas tramps or boys. We don't keep hens, but there's some stuff in that boathouse I wouldn't want stole, and, bein' as there's no lock on the door, a dog would be a sort of protection, as you might say."

"But thieves would never come way down here."

"Why not? 'Tain't any further away from the rest of creation than the life savin' station, is it? Anyhow, Henry G. give the dog to me free for nothin', and that's a miracle of itself. You'd say so, too, if you knew Henry. I was so surprised that I said I'd take it right off; felt 'twould be

flyin' in the face of Providence not to. A miracle —jumpin' Judas! I never knew Henry to give anybody anything afore—unless 'twas the small-pox, and then 'twan't a genuine case, nothin' but varioloid."

"But what kind of a dog is it?"

"I don't know. Henry used to own the mother of it, and she was one quarter mastiff and the rest assorted varieties. This one he's givin' me ain't a whole dog, you see; just a half-grown pup. The varioloid all over again—hey? Ho, ho! I didn't really take him for sartin, you understand; just on trial. If we like him, we'll keep him, that's all."

The third afternoon following this announcement, Brown was alone in the kitchen, and busy. Seth had departed on one of his mysterious excursions, carrying a coil of rope, a pulley and a gallon can of paint. Before leaving the house he had given his helper some instructions concerning supper.

"Might's well have a lobster tonight," he said. "Ever cook a lobster, did you?"

No, Mr. Brown had never cooked a lobster.

"Well, it's simple enough. All you've got to do is bile him. Bile him in hot water till he's done."

"I see." The substitute assistant was not enthusiastic. Cooking he did not love.

"Humph!" he grunted. "I imagined if he was boiled at all, it was be in hot water, not cold."

Atkins chuckled. "I mean you want to have the water bilin' hot when you put him in," he explained. "Wait till she biles up good and then souse him; see?"

"I guess so. How do you know when he's done?"

"Oh—er—I can't tell you. You'll have to trust to your instinct, I cal'late. When he looks done, he *is* done, most gen'rally speakin'."

"Dear me! how clear you make it. Would you mind hintin' as to how he looks when he's done?"

"Why—why, *done,* of course."

"Yes, of course. How stupid of me! He is done when he looks done, and when he looks done he is done. Any child could follow those directions. *How* is he done—brown?"

"No. Brown! the idea! Red, of course. He's green when you put him in the kittle, and when you take him out, he's red. That's one way you can tell."

"Yes, that will help some. All right, I'll boil him till he's red, you needn't worry about that."

"Oh, I sha'n't worry. So long. I'll be back about six or so. Put him in when the water's good and hot, and you'll come out all right."

"Thank you. I hope *he* will, but I have my doubts. Where is he?"

"Who? the lobster? There's dozens down in the car by the wharf. Lift the cover and fish one out with the dip net. Pick out the biggest one you can find, 'cause I'm likely to be hungry when I get back, and your appetite ain't a hummin' bird's. There! I've got to go if I want to get anything done afore— . . . Humph! never mind. So long."

He hurried away, as if conscious that he had said more than he intended. At the corner of the house he turned to call:

"I say! Brown! be kind of careful when you dip him out. None of 'em are plugged."

"What?"

"I say none of them lobsters' claws are plugged. I didn't have time to plug the last lot I got from my pots, so you want to handle 'em careful like, else they'll nip you. Tote the one you pick out up to the house in the dip-net; then you'll be all right."

Evidently considering this warning sufficient to

prevent any possible trouble, he departed. John Brown seated himself in the armchair by the door and gazed at the sea. He gazed and thought until he could bear to think no longer; then he rose and entered the kitchen, where he kindled a fire in the range and filled a kettle with water. Having thus made ready the sacrificial altar, he took the long-handled dip-net from its nail and descended the bluff to the wharf.

The lobster car, a good-sized affair of laths with a hinged cover closing the opening in its upper surface, was floating under the wharf, to which it was attached by a rope. Brown knelt on the string-piece and peered down at it. It floated deep in the water, the tide rippling strongly through it, between the laths. The cover was fastened with a wooden button.

The substitute assistant, after a deal of futile and exasperating poking with the handle of the net, managed to turn the button and throw back the leather-hinged cover. Through the square opening the water beneath looked darkly green. There was much seaweed in the car, and occasionally this weed was stirred by living things which moved sluggishly.

John Brown reversed the net, and, lying flat on

the wharf, gingerly thrust the business end of the contrivance through the opening and into the dark, weed-streaked water. Then he began feeling for his prey.

He could feel it. Apparently the car was alive with lobsters. As he moved the net through the water there was always one just before it or behind it; but at least ten minutes elapsed before he managed to get one in it. At length, when his arms were weary and his patience almost exhausted, the submerged net became heavy, and the handle shook in his grasp. He shortened his hold and began to pull in hand over hand. He had a lobster, a big lobster.

He could see a pair of claws opening and shutting wickedly. He raised the creature through the opening, balanced the net on its edge, rose on one knee, tried to stand erect, stumbled, lost his hold on the handle and shot the lobster neatly out of the meshes, over the edge of the car, and into the free waters of the channel. Then he expressed his feelings aloud and with emphasis.

Five minutes later he got another, but it was too small to be of use. In twenty minutes he netted three more, two of which got away. The third, however, he dragged pantingly to the wharf and

sat beside it, gloating. It was his for keeps, and it was a big one, the great-grandaddy of lobsters. Its claws clashed and snapped at the twine of the net like a pair of giant nut crackers.

Carrying it as far from his body as its weight at the end of the handle would permit, he bore it in triumph to the kitchen. To boil a lobster alive had seemed a mean trick, and cruel, when Seth Atkins first ordered him to do it. Now he didn't mind; it would serve the thing right for being so hard to catch. Entering the kitchen, he balanced the net across a chair and stepped to the range to see if the water was boiling. It was not, and for a very good reason—the fire had gone out. Again Mr. Brown expressed his feelings.

The fire, newly kindled, had burned to the last ash. If he had been there to add more coal in season, it would have survived; but he had been otherwise engaged. There was nothing to be done except rake out the ashes and begin anew. This he did. When he removed the kettle he decided at once that it was much too small for the purpose required of it. To boil a lobster of that size in a kettle of that size would necessitate boiling one end at a time, and that, both for the victim and himself, would be troublesome and agonizing. He

hunted about for a larger kettle and, finding none, seized in desperation upon the wash boiler, filled it, and lifted it to the top of the stove above the flickering new fire.

The fire burned slowly, and he sat down to rest and wait. As he sank into the chair—not that across which the netted lobster was balanced, but another—he became aware of curious sounds from without. Distant sounds they were, far off and faint, but growing steadily louder; wails and long-drawn howls, mournful and despairing.

"A-a-oo-ow! Aa-ow-ooo!"

"What in the world?" muttered Brown, and ran out of the kitchen and around the corner of the house.

There was nothing in sight, nothing strange or unusual, that is. Joshua, Seth's old horse, picketted to a post in the back yard and grazing, or trying to graze, on the stubby beach grass, was the only living exhibit. But the sounds continued and grew louder.

"Aa-ow-ooo! Ow-oo-ow-ooo!"

Over the rise of a dune, a hundred yards off, where the road to Eastboro village dipped towards a swampy hollow, appeared a horse's head and the top of a covered wagon. A moment later the

driver became visible, a freckled faced boy grinning like a pumpkin lantern. The horse trotted through the sand up to the lights. Joshua whinnied as if he enjoyed the prospect of company. From the back of the wagon, somewhere beneath the shade of the cover, arose a heartrending wail, reeking of sorrow and agony.

"Aa-ow-*ooo!* Ooo-aa-*ow!*"

"For heaven's sake," exclaimed the lightkeeper's helper, running to meet the vehicle, "what is the matter?"

The boy grinned more expansively than ever. "Whoa!" he shouted, to the horse he was driving. The animal stopped in his tracks, evidently glad of the opportunity. Another howl burst from the covered depths of the wagon.

"I've got him," said the boy, with a triumphant nod and a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder. "He's in there."

"He? Who? What?"

"Job. He's in there. Hear him? He's been goin' on like that ever since he finished his bone, and that was over two mile back. Say," admiringly, "he's some singer, ain't he! Hear that, will ye?"

Another wail arose from the wagon. Brown

hastened to the rear of the vehicle, on the canvas side of which were painted the words "Henry G. Goodspeed, Groceries, Dry and Fancy Goods and Notions, Eastboro," and peered in over the tail-board. The interior of the wagon was well nigh filled by a big box with strips of board nailed across its top. From between these strips a tawny nose was uplifted. As the helper stared wonderingly at the box and the nose, the boy sprang from his seat and joined him.

"That's him," declared the boy. "Hi, there, Job, tune up now! What's the matter with ye?"

His answer was an unearthly howl from the box, accompanied by a mighty scratching. The boy laughed delightedly.

"Ain't he a wonder?" he demanded. "Ought to be in church choir, hadn't he."

Brown stepped on the hub of a rear wheel, and, clinging to the post of the wagon cover, looked down into the box. The creature inside was about the size of a month old calf.

"It's a—it's a dog," he exclaimed. "A dog, isn't it?"

"Sure, it's a dog. Or he'll be a dog when he grows up. Nothin' but a pup now, he ain't. Where's Seth?"

"Seth? Oh, Mr. Atkins; he's not here."

"Ain't he? Where's he gone?"

"I don't know."

"Don't ye? When's he comin' back? *Hush up!*" This last was a command to the prisoner in the box, who paid absolutely no attention to it.

"I don't know when he'll be back. Do you want to see him personally? Won't I do? I'm in charge here till he returns."

"Be ye? Oh, you're the new assistant from Boston. You'll do. All I want to do is unload him—Job, I mean—and leave a couple bundles of fly paper Seth ordered. Here!" lowering the tailboard and climbing into the wagon, "you catch aholt of t'other end of the box, and I'll shove on this one. Hush up, Job! Nobody's goin' to eat ye—'less it's the moskeeters. Now, then, mister, here he comes."

He began pushing the box toward the open end of the wagon. The dog's whines and screams and scratchings furnished an accompaniment almost deafening.

"Wait! Stop! For heaven's sake, wait!" shouted Brown. "What are you putting that brute off here for? I don't want him."

"Yes, you do. Seth does, anyhow. Henry G.

made him a present of Job last time Seth was over to the store. Didn't he tell ye?"

Then the substitute assistant remembered. This was the "half-grown pup" Atkins had said was to be brought over by the grocery boy. This was the creature they were to accept "on trial."

"Well, by George!" he exclaimed in disgust.

"Didn't Seth tell ye?" asked the boy again.

"Yes. . . . Yes, I believe he did. But——"

"Then stand by while I unload him. Here he comes now. H'ist him down easy as you can."

That was not too easy, for the end of the box slid from the tail-board to the ground with a thump that shook the breath from the prisoner within. But the breath came back again and furnished motive power for more and worse howls and whines. Joshua pricked up his ears and trotted to the further end of his halter.

"There!" said Henry G.'s boy, jumping to the ground beside the box, "that's off my hands, thank the mercy! Here's your fly paper. Five dozen sheets. You must have pretty nigh as many flies down here as you have moskeeters. Well, so long. I got to be goin'."

"Wait a minute," pleaded Brown. "What shall I do with this—er—blessed dog? Is he sav-

age? Why did you bring him in a crate—like a piano?"

"'Cause 'twas the easiest way. You couldn't tie him up, not in a cart no bigger'n this. Might's well tie up an elephant. Besides, he won't stay tied up nowheres. Busted more clotheslines than I've got fingers and toes, that pup has. He needs a chain cable to keep him to his moorin's. Don't ye, Job, you old earthquake? Hey?"

He pounded on the box, and the earthquake obliged with a renewed series of shocks and shakings.

The lightkeeper's assistant smiled in spite of himself.

"Who named him Job?" he asked.

"Henry G.'s cousin from Boston. He said he seemed to be always sufferin' and fillin' the land with roarin's, like Job in the Bible. So, bein' as he hadn't no name except cuss words, that one stuck. I cal'late Henry G.'s glad enough to get rid of him. Ho! ho!"

"Did Mr. Atkins see his—this—did he see his present before he accepted it?"

"No. That's the best part of the joke. Well," clambering to his seat and picking up the reins, "I've got five mile of sand and moskeeters to

navigate, so I've got to be joggin'. Oh, say! goin' to leave him in the box there, be ye?"

"I guess so, for the present."

"Well, I wouldn't leave him too long. He's stronger'n Samson and the Philippines rolled together, and he's humped up his back so much on the way acrost that he's started most of the nails in them slats over top of him. I tell ye what you do: Give him a bone or a chunk of tough meat to chaw on. Then he'll rest easy for a spell. Goodbye. I wish I could stay and see Seth when he looks at his present, but I can't. Gid-dap, January."

The grocery wagon rolled out of the yard. The forsaken Job sent a roar of regret after him. Also, he "humped us his back," and the nails holding the slats in place started and gave alarmingly. John Brown hastened to the house in quest of a bone.

CHAPTER V

THE GOING OF JOSHUA

HE found one, after a time, the relic of a ham, with a good deal of meat on it. Atkins, economical soul, would have protested in horror against the sinful waste, but his helper would cheerfully have sacrificed a whole hog to quiet the wails from the box in the yard. He pushed the ham bone between the slats, and Job received it greedily. The howls and whines ceased and were succeeded by gnawings and crunchings. Brown returned to the kitchen to inspect his neglected fire.

This time the fire was not out, but it burned slowly. The water in the wash boiler was only lukewarm. The big lobster in the net balanced on the chair clashed his claws wickedly as the substitute assistant approached. The door had been left open, and the room hummed with flies. Brown shut the door and, while waiting for the water to

heat, separated a dozen sheets of the sticky fly paper and placed them in conspicuous places. He wondered as he did so what some of his former acquaintances would say if they could see him. He —*he*—a cook, and a roustabout, a dishwasher and a scrubber of brass at Eastboro Twin-Lights! How long must he stay there? For months at least. He should be thankful that he was there; thankful that there was such a place, where no one came and where he could remain until he was forgotten. He was thankful, of course he was. But what a life to live!

He wondered what Atkins thought of him; how much the lightkeeper guessed concerning his identity and his story. He could not guess within miles of the truth, but he must indulge in some curious speculations. Then he fell to wondering about Seth himself. What was it that the lightkeeper was hiding from the world? Odd that two people, each possessing a secret, should come together at that lonely spot. Where was it that Seth went almost every afternoon? Had these daily absences any connection with the great mystery?

He distributed the sheets of fly paper about the room, in places where he judged them likely to do the most good, and had the satisfaction of seeing

a number of the tormenting insects caught immediately. Then he tested the water in the boiler. It was warmer, even hot, but not boiling.

He had almost forgotten the dog, but now was reminded by the animal itself, who, having apparently swallowed the bone whole, began once more to howl lugubriously. Brown decided to let him howl for the present, and, going into the living-room, picked up an old magazine and began listlessly to read.

The howls from the yard continued, swelled to a crescendo of shrieks and then suddenly ceased. A moment later there was a thump and a mighty scratching at the kitchen door. The substitute assistant dropped the magazine and sprang from his chair.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed; "I believe——"

He did not finish the sentence. There was no need. If he had any doubts as to the cause of the racket at the door they were dispelled by a howl like a fog whistle. "Job" had escaped from durance vile and was seeking companionship.

Brown muttered an exclamation of impatience and, opening the door a very little way, peeped through the crack. The pup—he looked like a

scrawny young lion—hailed his appearance with a series of wild yelps. His mouth opened like a Mammoth Cave in miniature, and a foot of red tongue flapped like a danger signal.

"Get out, you brute!" ordered Brown.

Job did not get out. Instead he yelped again and capered with the grace of a cow. His feet and legs seemed to have grown out of proportion to the rest of him; they were enormous. Down the length of his yellow back were three raw furrows which the nails of the box cover had scraped as he climbed from under them.

"Nice dog!" coaxed the lightkeeper's helper. "Nice doggie! Good old boy!"

The good old boy pranced joyfully and made a charge at the door. Brown slammed it shut just in time.

"Clear out!" he yelled, from behind it. "Go away! Go and lie down!"

The answer was a mighty howl of disappointment and an assault on the door which threatened to shatter the panels. Job's paws were armed with claws proportionate to their size.

This would never do. The paint on that door had been furnished by the government, and Atkins was very careful of it. Brown, within, pounded

a protest and again commanded the dog to go and lie down. Job, without, thumped and scratched and howled louder than ever. He had decidedly the best of the duet, and the door was suffering every second. Brown picked up the fire shovel and threw the door wide open.

"Get out!" he roared. "Get out or I'll kill you!"

He brandished the shovel, expecting an assault. But none came. It was evident that Job knew a shovel when he saw it, had encountered other shovels in the course of his brief young life. His ears and tail drooped, and he backed away.

"Clear out!" repeated Brown, advancing threateningly. With each step of the advance, Job retreated a corresponding distance. When the assistant stopped, he stopped. Brown lowered the shovel and looked at him. The dog grovelled in the sand and whined dolefully.

"Humph!" grunted the young man; "I guess you're not as dangerous as you look. Stay where you are and keep still."

He turned to enter the kitchen, turning again just in time to find the pup at his heels. He lifted the shovel, and Job jumped frantically out of

reach, sat down in a clump of beach grass, lifted his nose to the sky and expressed his feelings in a howl of utter misery.

"Good—heavens!" observed John Brown fervently, and, shifting the shovel to his left hand, rubbed his forehead with his right. Job howled once more and gazed at him with sorrowful appeal. The situation was so ridiculous that the young man began to laugh. This merriment appeared to encourage the pup, who stopped howling and began to caper, throwing the loose sand from beneath his paws in showers.

"What's the matter, old boy?" inquired Brown. "Lonesome, are you?"

Job was making himself the center of a small-sized sand spout.

"Humph! Well . . . well, all right. I'm not going to hurt you. Stay where you are, and I won't shut the door."

But this compromise was not satisfactory, because the moment the young man started to cross the threshold the dog started to follow. When Brown halted, he followed suit—and howled. Then the substitute assistant surrendered unconditionally.

"All right," he said. "Come in, then, if you

want to. Come in! but for goodness sake keep still when you are in."

He strode into the kitchen, leaving the door open. Job slunk after him, and crouched with his muzzle across the sill, evidently not yet certain that his victory was complete. He did not howl, however, and his late adversary was thankful for the omission.

Brown bethought himself of the water in the wash boiler and, removing the cover, tested it with his finger. It was steadily heating, but not yet at the boiling point. He pushed the boiler aside, lifted a lid of the range and inspected the fire. From behind him came a yelp, another, a thump, and then a series of thumps and yelps. He turned and saw Job in the center of the floor apparently having a fit.

The moment his back was turned, the pup had sneaked into the kitchen. It was not a large kitchen, and Job was distinctly a large dog. Also, he was suspicious of further assaults with the fire shovel and had endeavored to find a hiding place under the table. In crawling beneath this article of furniture he had knocked off a sheet of the fly paper. This had fallen "butter side down" upon his back, and stuck fast. He reached aft to pull

it loose with his teeth and had encountered a second sheet laid on a chair. This had stuck to his neck. Job was an apprehensive animal by nature and as the result of experience, and his nerves were easily unstrung. He forgot the shovel, forgot the human whom he had been fearfully trying to propitiate, forgot everything except the dreadful objects which clung to him and pulled his hair. He rolled from beneath the table, a shrieking, kicking, snapping cyclone. And that kitchen was no place for a cyclone.

He rolled and whirled for an instant, then scrambled to his feet and began running in widening circles. Brown tried to seize him as he passed, but he might as well have seized a railroad train. Another chair, also loaded with fly paper, upset, and Job added a third sheet to his collection. This one plastered itself across his nose and eyes. He ceased running forward and began to leap high in the air and backwards. The net containing the big lobster fell to the floor. Then John Brown fled to the open air, leaned against the side of the building and screamed with laughter.

Inside the kitchen the uproar was terrific. Howls, shrill yelps, thumps and crashes. Then came a crash louder than any preceding it, a splash

of water across the sill, and from the doorway leaped, or flew, an object steaming and dripping, fluttering with fly paper, and with a giant lobster clamped firmly to its tail. The lobster was knocked off against the door post, but the rest of the exhibit kept on around the corner of the house, shrieking as it flew. Brown collapsed in the sand and laughed until his sides ached and he was too weak to laugh longer.

At last he got up and staggered after it. He was still laughing when he reached the back yard, but there he stopped laughing and uttered an exclamation of impatience and some alarm.

Of Job there was no sign, though from somewhere amid the dunes sounded yelps, screams and the breaking of twigs as the persecuted one fled blindly through the bayberry and beachplum bushes. But Brown was not anxious about the dog. What caused him to shout and then break into a run was the sight of Joshua, the old horse, galloping at top speed along the road to the south. Even his sedate and ancient calm had not been proof against the apparition which burst from the kitchen. In his fright he had broken his halter rope and managed—a miracle, considering his age—to leap the pasture fence and run.

That horse was the apple of Seth Atkins's eye. The lightkeeper believed him to be a wonder of strength and endurance, and never left the lights without cautioning his helper to keep an eye on Joshua, "'cause if anything happened to him I'd have to hunt a mighty long spell to find another that could tech him." Brown accepted this trust with composure, feeling morally certain that the only thing likely to happen to Joshua was death from overeating or old age. And now something had happened—Joshua was running away.

There was but one course to take; Brown must leave the government's property in its own care and capture that horse. He had laughed until running seemed an impossibility, but run he must, and did, after a fashion. But Joshua was running, too, and he was frightened. He galloped like a colt, and the assistant lightkeeper gained upon him very slowly.

The road was crooked and hilly, and the sand in its ruts was deep. Brown would not have gained at all, but for the fact that the horse, from long habit, kept to the roadway and never tried short cuts. His pursuer did, and, therefore, just as Joshua entered the grove on the bluff above Pound-dug Slough, Brown caught up with him and made

a grab at the end of the trailing halter. He missed it, and the horse took a fresh start.

The road through the grove was overgrown with young trees and bushes, and amid these the animal had a distinct advantage. Not until the outer edge of the grove was reached did the panting assistant get another opportunity at the rope. This time he seized it and held on.

"Whoa!" he shouted. "Whoa!"

But Joshua did not "whoa" at once. He kept on along the edge of the high, sandy slope. Brown, from the tail of his eye, caught a glimpse of the winding channel of the Slough beneath him, of a small schooner heeled over on the mud flat at its margin, and of the figure of a man at work beside it.

"Whoa!" he ordered once more. "Whoa, Josh! stand still!"

Perhaps the horse would have stood still—he seemed about to do so—but from the distance, somewhere on the road he had just traversed, came a howl, long-drawn and terrifyingly familiar. Joshua heard it, jumped sidewise, jerked at the halter and, as if playing "snap the whip," sent his would-be captor heels over head over the edge of the bank and rolling down the sandy slope. The

halter flew from Brown's hands, he rolled and bumped and clutched at clumps of grass and bushes. Then he struck the beach and stopped, spread-eagled on the wet sand.

A voice said: "Well—by—*time!*"

Brown looked up. Seth Atkins, a paint pail in one hand and a dripping brush in the other, was standing beside him, blank astonishment written on his features.

"Well—by time!" said Seth again, and with even stronger emphasis.

The substitute assistant raised himself to his knees, rubbed his back with one hand, and then, turning, sat in the sand and returned his superior's astonished gaze with one of equal bewilderment.

"Hello!" he gasped. "Well, by George! it's you, isn't it! What are you doing here?"

The lightkeeper put down the pail of paint.

"What am I doin'?" he repeated. "What am *I* doin'——? Say!" His astonishment changed to suspicion and wrath. "Never you mind what I'm doin'," he went on. "That's my affairs. What are *you* doin' here? That's what I want to know."

Brown rubbed the sand out of his hair.

"I don't know exactly what I am doing—yet," he panted.

"You don't, hey? Well, you'd better find out. Maybe I can help you to remember. Sneakin' after me, wa'n't you? Spyin', to find out what I was up to, hey?"

He shook the wet paint brush angrily at his helper. Brown looked at him for an instant; then he rose to his feet.

"Spyin' on me, was you?" repeated Seth. "Didn't I tell you that mindin' your own business was part of our dicker if you was goin' to stay at Eastboro lighthouse? Didn't I tell you that?"

The young man answered with a contemptuous shrug. Turning on his heel, he started to walk away. Atkins sprang after him.

"Answer me," he ordered. "Didn't I say you'd got to mind your own business?"

"You did," coldly.

"You bet I did! And was you mindin' it?"

"No. I was minding yours—like a fool. Now you may mind it yourself."

"Hold on there! Where you goin'?"

"Back to the lights. And you may go to the devil, or anywhere else that suits your convenience, and take your confounded menagerie with you."

"My menag—— What on earth? Say, hold on! Mercy on us, what's that?"

From the top of the bluff came a crashing and a series of yelps. Through the thicket of beach-plum bushes was thrust a yellow head, fringed with torn fragments of fly paper.

"What's that?" demanded the astonished lightkeeper.

Brown looked at the whining apparition in the bushes and smiled maliciously.

"That," he observed, "is Job."

"*Job?*"

"Yes." From somewhere in the grove came a thrashing of branches and a frightened neigh. "And that," he continued, "is Joshua, I presume. If there are more Old Testament patriarchs in the vicinity, I don't know where they are, and I don't care. You may hunt for them yourself. I'm going to follow your advice and mind my own business. Good by."

He strode off up the beach. Job, at the top of the bank, started to follow, but a well-aimed pebble caused him to dodge back.

"Hold on!" roared the lightkeeper. "Maybe I made a mistake. Perhaps you wa'n't spyin' on me. Don't go off mad. I . . . Wait!"

But John Brown did not wait. He strode rapidly away up the beach. Seth stared after him.

From the grove, where his halter had caught firmly in the fork of a young pine, Joshua thrashed and neighed.

"Aa-oo-ow!" howled Job, from the bushes.

An hour later Atkins, leading the weary and homesick Joshua by the bridle, trudged in at the lighthouse yard. Job, still ornamented with remnants of the fly paper, slunk at his heels. Seth stabled the horse and, after some manœuvering, managed to decoy the dog down the slope to the boathouse, where he closed the door upon him and his whines. Then he climbed back to the kitchen.

The table was set for one, and in the wash boiler on the range the giant lobster was cooking. Of the substitute assistant keeper there was no sign, but, after searching, Seth found him in his room.

"Well?" observed Atkins, gruffly, "we might 's well have supper, hadn't we?"

Brown did not seem interested. "Your supper is ready, I think," he answered. "I tried not to forget anything."

"I guess 'tis; seems to be. Come on, and we'll eat."

"I have eaten, thank you."

"You have? Alone?"

"Yes. That, too," with emphasis, "is a part of my business."

The lightkeeper stared, grunted, and then went out of the room. He ate a lonely meal, not of the lobster—he kept that for another occasion—but one made up of cold scraps from the pantry. He wandered uneasily about the premises, quieted Job's wails for the time by a gift of eatable odds and ends tossed into the boathouse, smoked, tried to read, and, when it grew dusk, lit the lamps in the towers. At last he walked to the closed door of his helper's room and rapped.

"Well?" was the ungracious response.

"It's me, Atkins," he announced, hesitatingly. "I'd like to speak to you, if you don't mind."

"On business?"

"Well, no—not exactly. Say, Brown, I guess likely I'd ought to beg your pardon again. I cal'late I've made another mistake. I jedge you wa'n't spyin' on me when you dove down that bankin'."

"Your judgment is good this time. I was not."

"No, I'm sartin you wa'n't. I apologize and take it all back. Now can I come in?"

The door was thrown open. Seth entered, looking sheepish, and sat down in the little cane-seated rocker.

"Say," he began, after a moment of uncomfortable silence, "would you mind—now that I've begged your pardon and all—tellin' me what did happen while I was away. I imagine, judgin' by the looks of things in the kitchen, that there was —er—well, consider'ble doin', as the boys say."

He grinned. Brown tried to be serious, but was obliged to smile in return.

"I'll tell you," he said. "Of course you know where that—er—remarkable dog came from?"

"I can guess," drily. "Henry G.'s present, ain't he? Humph! Well, I'd ought to have known that anything Henry would *give* away was likely to be remarkable in all sorts of ways. All right! that's one Henry's got on me. Tomorrow afternoon me and Job take a trip back to Eastboro, and one of us stays there. It may be me, but I have my doubts. I agreed to take a *dog* on trial, not a yeller-jaundiced cow with a church organ inside of it. Hear the critter whoopin' down there in the boathouse! And he's eat everything that's chewable on the reservation already. He's a famine on legs, that pup. But never mind him. He's been tried—and found guilty. Tell me what happened."

Brown began the tale of the afternoon's per-

formances, beginning with his experience as a lobster catcher. Seth smiled, then chuckled, and finally burst into roars of laughter, in which the narrator joined.

"Jiminy crimps!" exclaimed Seth, when the story was finished. "Oh, by jiminy crimps! that beats the Dutch, and everybody's been told what the Dutch beat. Ha, ha! ho, ho! Brown, I apologize all over again. I don't wonder you was put out when I accused you of spyin'. Wonder you hadn't riz up off that sand and butchered me where I stood. Cal'late that's what I'd have done in your place. Well, I hope there's no hard feelin's now."

"No. Your apology is accepted."

"That's good. Er—er—say, you—you must have been sort of surprised to see me paintin' the *Daisy M.*"

"The which?"

"The *Daisy M.* That's the name of that old schooner I was to work on."

"Indeed. . . . How is the weather tonight, clear?"

"Yes, it's fair now, but looks sort of thick to the east'ard. I say you must have been surprised to see me paintin' the *Daisy M.* I've been tinkerin'

on that old boat, off and on, ever since last fall. Bought her for eight dollars of the feller that owned her, and she was a hulk for sartin then. I've caulked her up and rigged her, after a fashion. Now she might float, if she had a chance. Every afternoon, pretty nigh, I've been at her. Don't know exactly why I do it, neither. And yet I do, too. Prob'ly you've wondered where I was takin' all that old canvas and stuff. I——"

"Excuse me, Atkins. I mind my own business, you know. I ask no questions, and you are under no obligation to tell me anything."

"I know, I know." The lightkeeper nodded solemnly. He clasped his knee with his hands and rocked back and forth in his chair. "I know," he went on, an absent, wistful look in his eye; "but you must have wondered, just the same. I bought that craft because—well, because she reminded me of old times, I cal'late. I used to command a schooner like her once; bigger and lots more able, of course, but a fishin' schooner, same as she used to be. And I was a good skipper, if I do say it. My crews jumped when I said the word, now I tell you. That's where I belong—on the deck of a vessel. I'm a man there—a man."

He paused. Brown made no comment. Seth

continued to rock and to talk; he seemed to be thinking aloud.

"Yes, sir," he declared, with a sigh; "when I was afloat I was a man, and folks respected me. I just do love salt water and sailin' craft. That's why I bought the *Daisy M.* I've been riggin' her and caulkin' her just for the fun of doin' it. She'll never float again. It would take a tide like a flood to get her off them flats. But when I'm aboard or putterin' around her, I'm happy—happier, I mean. It makes me forget I'm a good-for-nothin' derelict, stranded in an old woman's job of lightkeepin'. Ah, hum-a-day, young feller, you don't know what it is to have been somebody, and then, because you was a fool and did a fool thing, to be nothin'—nothin'! You don't know what that is."

John Brown caught his breath. His fist descended upon the window ledge beside him.

"Don't I!" he groaned. "By George, don't I! Do you suppose——"

He stopped short. Atkins started and came out of his dream.

"Why—why, yes," he said, hastily; "I s'pose likely you do. . . . Well, good night. I've got to go on watch. See you in the mornin'."

CHAPTER VI

THE PICNIC

SETH was true to his promise concerning Job. The next afternoon that remarkable canine was decoyed, by the usual bone, into the box in which he had arrived. Being in, the cover was securely renailed above him. Brown and the light-keeper lifted the box into the back part of the "open wagon," and Atkins drove triumphantly away, the pup's agonized protests against the journey serving as spurs to urge Joshua faster along the road to the village. When, about six o'clock, Seth reëntered the yard, he was grinning broadly.

"Well," inquired Brown, "did he take him back willingly?"

"Who? Henry G.? I don't know about the willin' part, but he'll take him back. I attended to that."

"What did he say? Did he think you ungrateful for refusing to accept his present?"

Atkins laughed aloud. "He didn't say nothin'," he declared. "He didn't know it when I left Eastboro. I wa'n't such a fool as to cart that critter to the store, where all the gang 'round the store could holler and make fun. Not much! I drove way round the other way, up the back road, and unloaded him at Henry's house. I cal'lated to leave him with Aunt Olive—that's Henry's sister, keepin' house for him—but she'd gone out to sewin' circle, and there wa'n't nobody to home. The side door was unlocked, so I lugged that box into the settin' room and left it there. Pretty nigh broke my back; and that everlastin' Job hollered so I thought the whole town would hear him and come runnin' to stop the murderin' that they'd cal'late was bein' done. But there ain't no nigh neighbors, and those that are nighest ain't on speakin' terms with Henry; ruther have him murdered than not, I shouldn't wonder. So I left Job in his box in the settin' room and cleared out."

The substitute assistant smiled delightedly.

"Good enough!" he exclaimed. "What a pleasant surprise for friend Henry or his housekeeper."

"Ho, ho! ain't it! I rather guess 'twill be Henry himself that's surprised fust. Aunt Olive

never leaves sewin' circle till the last bit of supper's eat up—she's got some of her brother's stinginess in her make-up—so I cal'late Henry'll get home afore she does. I shouldn't wonder," with an exuberant chuckle, "if that settin' room was some stirred up when he sees it. The pup had loosened the box cover afore I left. Ho, ho!"

"But won't he send the dog back here again?"

"No, he won't. I left a note for him on the table. There was consider'ble ginger in every line of it. No, Job won't be sent here, no matter what becomes of him. And if anything *should* be broke in that settin' room—well, there was *some* damage done to our kitchen. No, I guess Henry G. and me are square. He won't make any fuss; he wants to keep our trade, you see."

It was a true prophecy. The storekeeper made no trouble, and Job remained at Eastboro until a foray on a neighbor's chickens resulted in his removal from this vale of tears. Neither the lightkeeper nor his helper ever saw him again, and when Seth next visited the store and solicitously inquired concerning the pup's health, Henry G. merely looked foolish and changed the subject.

But the dog's short sojourn at the Twin-Lights had served to solve one mystery, that of Atkins's

daily excursions to Pounddug Slough. He went there to work on the old schooner, the *Daisy M.* Seth made no more disclosures concerning his past life—that remained a secret—but he did suggest his helper's going to inspect the schooner. "Just walk across and look her over," he said. "I'd like to know what you think of her. See if I ain't makin' a pretty good job out of nothin'. *For* nothin', of course," he added, gloomily; "but it keeps me from thinkin' too much. Go and see her, that's a good feller."

So the young man did go. He climbed aboard the stranded craft—a forlorn picture she made, lying on her side in the mud—and was surprised to find how much had been manufactured "out of nothing." Her seams, those which the sun had opened, were caulked neatly; her deck was clean and white; she was partially rigged, with new and old canvas and ropes; and to his landsman's eyes she looked almost fit for sea. But when he said as much to Seth, the latter laughed scornfully.

"Fit for nothin'," scoffed the lightkeeper. "I could make her fit, maybe, if I wanted to spend money enough, but I don't. I can't get at her starboard side, that's down in the mud, and I cal'late she'd leak like a skimmer. She's only got a fores'l

and a jib, and the jib's only a little one that used to belong to a thirty-foot sloop. Her anchor's gone, and I wouldn't trust her main topmast to carry anything bigger'n a handkerchief, nor that in a breeze no more powerful than a canary bird's breath. And, as I told you, it would take a tide like a flood to float her. No, she's no good, and never will be; but," with a sigh, " I get a little fun fussin' over her."

" Er—by the way," he added, a little later, " of course you won't mention to nobody what I told you about—about my bein' a fishin' skipper once. Not that anybody ever comes here for you to mention it to, but I wouldn't want . . . You see, nobody in Eastboro or anywheres on the Cape knows where I come from, and so . . . Oh, all right, all right. I know you ain't the kind to talk. Mind our own business, that's the motto you and me cruise under, hey? "

Yet, although the conversation in the substitute assistant's room was not again referred to by either, it had the effect of making the oddly assorted pair a bit closer in their companionship. The mutual trust was strengthened by the lightkeeper's half confidence and Brown's sympathetic reception of it. Each was lonely, each had moments when he felt

he must express his hidden feelings to some one, and, though neither recognized the fact, it was certain that the time was coming when all mysteries would be mysteries no longer. And one day occurred a series of ridiculous happenings which, bidding fair at first to end in a quarrel the relationship between the two, instead revealed in both a kindred trait that removed the last barrier.

At a little before ten on this particular morning, Brown, busy in the kitchen, heard vigorous language outside. It was Atkins who was speaking, and the assistant wondered who on earth he could be talking to. A glance around the doorpost showed that he was, apparently, talking to himself —at least, there was no other human being to be seen. He held in his hand a battered pair of marine glasses and occasionally he peered through them. Each time he did so his soliloquy became more animated and profane.

"What's the matter?" demanded Brown, emerging from the house.

"Matter?" repeated Seth. "Matter enough! Here! take a squint through them glasses and tell me who's in that buggy comin' yonder?"

The buggy, a black dot far down the sandy road leading from the village, was rocking and dipping

over the dunes. The assistant took the glasses, adjusted them, and looked as directed.

"Why!" he said slowly, "there are three people in that buggy. A man—and——"

"And two women; that's what I thought. Dum idiots comin' over to picnic and spend the day, sure's taxes. And they'll want to be showed round the lights and everywheres, and they'll ask more'n forty million questions. Consarn the luck!"

Brown looked troubled. He had no desire to meet strangers.

"How do you know they're coming here?" he asked. The answer was conclusive.

"Because," snarled Seth, "as I should think you'd know by this time, there ain't no other place round here they *could* come to."

A moment later, he added, "Well, you'll have to show 'em round."

"*I* will?"

"Sartin. That's part of the assistant keeper's job."

He chuckled as he said it. That chuckle grated on the young man's nerves.

"I'm not the assistant," he declared cheerfully.

"You ain't? What are you then?"

"Oh, just a helper. I don't get any wages.

You've told me yourself, over and over, that I have no regular standing here. And, according to the government rules, those you've got posted in the kitchen, the lightkeeper is obliged to show visitors about. I wouldn't break the rules for the world. Good morning. Think I'll go down to the beach."

He stalked away whistling. Atkins, his face flaming, roared after him a profane opinion concerning his actions. Then he went into the kitchen, slamming the door with a bang.

Some twenty minutes later the helper heard his name shouted from the top of the bluff.

"Mr. Brown! I say! Ahoy there, Mr. Brown! Come up here a minute, won't ye?"

Brown clambered up the path. A little man, with grey throat whiskers, and wearing an antiquated straw hat, the edge of the brim trimmed with black braid, was standing waiting for him.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Brown," stammered the little man, "but you be Mr. Brown, ain't you?"

"I am. Yes."

"Well, I cal'lated you was. My name's Stover, Abijah Stover. I live over to Trumet. Me and my wife drove over for a sort of picnic like.

We've got her cousin, Mrs. Sophia Hains, along. Sophi's a widow from Boston, and she ain't never seen a lighthouse afore. I know Seth Atkins slightly, and I was cal'latin' he'd show us around, but bein' as he's so sick——"

"Sick? Is Mr. Atkins sick?"

"Why, yes. Didn't you know it? He's in the bedroom there groanin' somethin' terrible. He told me not to say nothin' to the women folks, but to hail you, and you'd look out for us. Didn't you know he was laid up? Why, he——"

Brown did not wait to hear more. He strode to the house, with Mr. Stover at his heels. On his way he caught a glimpse of the buggy, the horse dozing between the shafts. On the seat of the buggy were two women, one plump and round-faced, the other thin and gaunt.

Mr. Stover panted behind him.

"Say, Mr. Brown," he whispered, as they entered the kitchen; "don't tell my wife nor Sophi about Seth's bein' sick. Better not say a word to them about it."

The tone in which this was spoken made the substitute assistant curious.

"Why not?" he asked.

"'Cause—well, 'cause Hannah's hobby is sick

folks, as you might say. If there's a cat in the neighborhood that's ailin' she's always dosin' of it up and fixin' medicine for it, and the like of that. And Sophi's one of them 'New Thoughters' and don't believe anybody's got any right to be sick. The two of 'em ain't done nothin' but argue and row over diseases and imagination and medicines ever since Sophi got here. If they knew Seth was laid up, I honestly believe they'd drop picnic and everythin' and start fightin' over whether he was really sick or just thought he was. And I sort of figgered on havin' a quiet day off."

Brown found the lightkeeper stretched on the bed in his room. He was dressed, with the exception of coat and boots, and when the young man entered he groaned feebly.

"What's the matter?" demanded the alarmed helper.

"Oh, my!" groaned Seth. "Oh, my!"

"Are you in pain? What is it? Shall I 'phone for the doctor?"

"No, no. No use gettin' the doctor. I'll be all right by and by. It's one of my attacks. I have 'em every once in a while. Just let me alone, and let me lay here without bein' disturbed; then I'll get better, I guess."

"But it's so sudden!"

"I know. They always come on that way. Now run along, like a good feller, and leave me to my suff'rin's. O-oh, dear!"

Much troubled, Brown turned to the door. As he was going out he happened to look back. The dresser stood against the wall beyond the bed, and in its mirror he caught a glimpse of the face of the sick man. On that face, which should have been distorted with agony, was a broad grin.

Brown found the little Stover man waiting for him in the kitchen.

"Be you ready?" he asked.

"Ready?" repeated Brown, absently. "Ready for what?"

"Why, to show us round the lights. Sophi, she ain't never seen one afore. Atkins said that, bein' as he wasn't able to leave his bed, you'd show us around."

"He did, hey?"

"Yes. He said you'd be glad to."

"Hum!" Mr. Brown's tone was that of one upon whom, out of darkness, a light has suddenly burst. "I see," he mused, thoughtfully. "Yes, yes. I see."

For a minute he stood still, evidently pondering.

Then, with a twinkle in his eye, he strode out of the house and walked briskly across to the buggy.

"Good morning, ladies," he said, removing the new cap which Seth had recently purchased for him in Eastboro. "Mr. Stover tells me you wish to be shown the lights."

The plump woman answered. "Yes," she said, briskly, "we do. Are you a new keeper? Where's Mr. Atkins?"

"Mr. Atkins, I regret to say," began Brown, "is ill. He——"

Stover, standing at his elbow, interrupted nervously.

"Mr. Brown here'll show us around," he said quickly. "Seth said he would."

"I shall be happy," concurred that young gentleman. "You must excuse me if I seem rather worried. Mr. Atkins, my chief—I believe you know him, Mrs. Stover—has been taken suddenly ill, and is, apparently, suffering much pain. The attack was very sudden, and I——"

"Sick?" The plump woman seemed actually to prick up her ears, like a sleepy cat at the sound of the dinner bell. "Is Seth sick? And you all alone with him here? Can't I do anything to help?"

"All he wants is to be left alone," put in her husband anxiously. "He said so himself."

"Do you know what's the matter? Have you got any medicine for him?" Mrs. Stover was already climbing out of the buggy.

"No," replied Brown. "I haven't. That is, I haven't given him any yet."

The slim woman, Mrs. Hains of Boston, now broke into the conversation.

"Good thing!" she snapped. "Most medicine's nothing but opium and alcohol. Fill the poor creature full of drugs and——"

"I s'pose you'd set and preach New Thought at him!" snapped Mrs. Stover. "As if a body could be cured by hot air! I believe I'll go right in and see him. Don't you s'pose I could help, Mr. Brown?"

Mr. Brown seemed pleased, but reluctant. "It's awfully good of you," he said. "I couldn't think of troubling you when you've come so far on a pleasure excursion. But I am at my wit's end."

"Don't say another word!" Mrs. Stover's bulky figure was already on the way to the door of the house. "I'm only too glad to do what I can. And, if I do say it, that shouldn't, I'm always real

handy in a sick room. 'Bijah, be quiet; I don't care if we *are* on a picnic; no human bein' shall suffer while I set around and do nothin'."

Mrs. Hains was at her cousin's heels.

"You'll worry him to death," she declared. "You'll tell him how sick he is, and that he's goin' to die, and such stuff. What he needs is cheerful conversation and mental uplift. It's too bad! Well, you sha'n't have your own way with him, anyhow. Mr. Brown, where is he?"

"You two goin' to march right into his *bedroom?*" screamed the irate Abijah. The women answered not. They were already in the kitchen. Brown hastened after them.

"It's all right, ladies," he said. "Right this way, please."

He led the way to the chamber of the sick man. Mr. Atkins turned on his bed of pain, caught a glimpse of the visitors, and sat up.

"What in time?" he roared.

"Seth," said Brown, benignly, "this is Mrs. Stover of Eastboro. I think you know her. And Mrs. Hains of Boston. These ladies have heard of your sickness, and, having had experience in such cases, have kindly offered to stay with you and help in any way they can. Mrs. Stover, I will

leave him in your hands. Please call me if I can be of any assistance."

Without waiting for further comment from the patient, whose face was a picture, he hastened to the kitchen, choking as he went. Mr. Stover met him at the outer door.

"Now you've done it!" wailed the little man. "*Now* you've done it! Didn't I tell you? Oh, this'll be a hell of a picnic!"

He stalked away, righteous indignation overcoming him. Brown sat down in a rocking chair and shook with emotion. From the direction of the sick room came the sounds of three voices, each trying to outscream the other. The substitute assistant listened to this for a while, and, as he did so, a new thought struck him. He remembered a story he had read in a magazine years before. He crossed to the pantry, found an empty bottle, rinsed it at the sink, stepped again to the pantry, and, entering it, closed the door behind him. There he busied himself with the molasses jug, the soft-soap bucket, the oil can, the pepper shaker, and a few other utensils and their contents. Footsteps in the kitchen caused him to hurriedly reënter that apartment. Mrs. Stover was standing by the range, her face red.

"Oh, there you are, Mr. Brown!" she exclaimed. "I wondered where you'd gone to."

"How is he?" inquired Brown, the keenest anxiety in his utterance.

"H'm! he'd do well enough if he had the right treatment. I cal'late he's better now, even as 'tis; but, when a person has to lay and hear over and over again that what ails 'em is nothin' but imagination, it ain't to be wondered at that they get mad. What he needs is some sort of soothin' medicine, and I only wish 'twan't so fur over to home. I've got just what he needs there."

"I was thinking—" began Brown.

"What was you thinkin'?"

"I was wondering if some of my 'Stomach Balm' wouldn't help him. It's an old family receipt, handed down from the Indians, I believe. I always have a bottle with me and . . . Still, I wouldn't prescribe, not knowing the disease."

Mrs. Stover's eyes sparkled. Patent medicines were her hobby.

"Hum!" she said. "'Stomach Balm' sounds good. And he says his trouble is principally stomach. Some of them Indian medicines are mighty powerful. Have you—did you say you had a bottle with you, Mr. Brown?"

The young man went again to the pantry and returned with the bottle he had so recently found there. Now, however, it was two thirds full of a black sticky mixture. Mrs. Stover removed the cork and took an investigating sniff.

"It smells powerful," she said, hopefully.

"It is. Would you like to taste it?" handing her a tablespoon. He watched as she swallowed a spoonful.

"Ugh! oh!" she gasped; even her long suffering palate rebelled at *that* taste. "It—I should think that *ought* to help him."

"I should think so. It may be the very thing he needs. At any rate, it can't hurt him. It's quite harmless."

Mrs. Stover's face was still twisted, under the influence of the "Balm"; but her mind was made up.

"I'm goin' to try it," she declared. "I don't care if every New Thoughter in creation says no. He needs medicine and needs it right away."

"The dose," said Mr. Brown, gravely, "is two tablespoonfuls every fifteen minutes. I do hope it will help him. Give him my sympathy—my deepest sympathy, Mrs. Stover, please."

The plump lady disappeared in the direction of

the sick room. The substitute assistant lingered and listened. He heard a shrill pow-wow of feminine voices. Evidently "New Thought" and the practice of medicine had once more clashed. The argument waxed and waned. Followed the click of a spoon against glass. And then came a gasp, a gurgle, a choking yell; and high upon the salty air enveloping Eastboro Twin-Lights rose the voice of Mr. Seth Atkins, expressing his opinion of the "Stomach Balm" and those who administered it.

John Brown darted out of the kitchen, dodged around the corner of the house, tiptoed past the bench by the bluff, where Mr. Stover sat gloomily meditating, and ran lightly down the path to the creek and the wharf. The boathouse at the end of the wharf offered a convenient refuge. Into the building he darted, closed the door behind him, and collapsed upon a heap of fish nets.

At three-thirty that afternoon, Mr. Atkins, apparently quite recovered, was sitting in the kitchen rocker, reading a last week's newspaper, one of a number procured on his most recent trip to the village. The Stovers and their guest had departed. Their buggy was out of sight beyond the dunes. A slight noise startled the lightkeeper, and he

looked up. His helper was standing in the doorway, upon his face an expression of intense and delighted surprise.

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Brown. "What? Is it really you?"

Seth put down the paper and nodded.

"Um-hm," he observed drily, "it's really me."

"Up? and *well?*" queried Brown.

"Um-hm. Pretty well, considerin', thank you. Been for a stroll up Washin'ton Street, have you? Or a little walk on the Common, maybe?"

The elaborate sarcasm of these questions was intended to be withering. Mr. Brown, however, did not wither. Neither did he blush.

"I have been," he said, "down at the boathouse. I knew you were in safe hands and well looked after, so I went away. I couldn't remain here and hear you suffer."

"Hum! *hear* me suffer, hey? Much obliged, I'm sure. What have you been doin' there all this time? I hoped you was—that is, I begun to be afraid you was dead. Thought your sympathy for me had been too much for you, maybe."

Brown mournfully shook his head. "It was—almost," he said, solemnly. "I think I dropped asleep. I was quite overcome."

"Hum! Better take a dose of that 'Stomach Balm,' hadn't you? That'll liven you up, I'll guarantee."

"No, thank you. The sight of you, well and strong again, is all the medicine I need. We must keep the 'Balm' in case you have another attack. By the way, I notice the dinner dishes haven't been washed. I'll do them at once. I know you must be tired, after your illness—and the exertion of showing your guests about the lights."

Atkins did not answer, although he seemed to want to very much. However, he made no objection when his helper, rolling up his sleeves, turned to the sink and the dish washing.

Seth was silent all the rest of the afternoon and during supper. But that evening, as Brown sat on the bench outside, Atkins joined him.

"Hello!" said Seth, as cheerfully as if nothing had happened.

"Hello!" replied the assistant, shortly. He had been thinking once more, and his thoughts were not pleasant.

"I s'pose you cal'late," began Atkins, "that maybe I've got a grudge against you on account of this mornin' and that 'Balm' and such. I ain't."

"That's good. I'm glad to hear it."

"Yes. After the fust dose of that stuff—for thunder sakes *what* did you put in it?—I was about ready to murder you, but I've got over that. I don't blame you for gettin' even. We are even, you know."

"I'm satisfied, if you are."

"I be. But what I don't understand is why you didn't want to show them folks around."

"Oh, I don't know. I had my reasons, such as they were. Why didn't you want to do it yourself?"

Seth crossed his legs and was silent for a moment or two. Then he spoke firmly and as if his mind was made up.

"Young feller," he said, "I don't know whether you realize it or not, and perhaps I shouldn't be the one to mention it—but you're under some obligations to me."

His companion nodded. "I realize that," he said.

"Yes, but maybe you don't realize the amount of the obligations. I'm riskin' my job keepin' you here. If it wa'n't for the superintendent bein' such a friend of mine, there'd have been a reg'lar assistant keeper app'inted long ago. The gov'ment don't pick up its lightkeepers same as you would

farm hands. There's civil service to be gone through, and the like of that. But you wanted to stay, and I've kept you, riskin' my own job, as I said. And now I cal'late we'd better have a plain understandin'. You've got to know just what your job is. I'm goin' to tell you."

He stopped, as if to let this sink in. Brown nodded again. "All right," he observed, carelessly; "go on and tell me; I'm listening."

"Your job around the lights you know already, part of it. But there's somethin' else. Whenever men folks come here, I'll do my share of showin' the place off. But when women come —women, you understand—you've got to be guide. I'll forgive you to-day's doin's. I tried to play a joke on you, and you evened it up with a better one on me. That's all right. But, after this, showin' the lights to females is your job, and you've got to do it—or get out. No hard feelin's at all, and I'd really hate to lose you, but *that's* got to be as I say."

He rose, evidently considering the affair settled. Brown caught his coat and pulled him back to the bench.

"Wait, Atkins," he said. "I'm grateful to you for your kindness, I like you and I'd like to please you; but if what you say is final, then—as they used

to say in some play or other—'I guess you'll have to hire another boy.'"

"What? You mean you'll quit?"

"Rather than do that—yes."

"But why?"

"For reasons, as I told you. By the way, you haven't told me why you object to acting as guide to—females."

"Because they are females. They're women, darn 'em!"

Before his helper could comment on this declaration, it was repeated. The lightkeeper shook both his big fists in the air.

"Darn 'em! Darn all the women!" shouted Seth Atkins.

"Amen," said John Brown, devoutly.

Seth's fists dropped into his lap. "What?" he cried; "what did you say?"

"I said Amen."

"But—but . . . why . . . you didn't mean it!"

"Didn't I?" bitterly. "Humph!"

Seth breathed heavily, started to speak once more, closed his lips on the words, rose, walked away a few paces, returned, and sat down.

"John Brown," he said, solemnly, "if you're

jokin', the powers forgive you, for I won't. If you ain't, I—I . . . See here, do you remember what you asked me that night when you struck me for the assistant keeper's job? You asked me if I was married?"

Brown assented wonderingly. "Why, yes," he said, "I believe I did."

"You did. And I ain't been so shook up for many a day. Young feller, I'm goin' to tell you what no other man in Ostable County knows. I *am* married. I've got a wife livin'."

CHAPTER VII

OUT OF THE BAG

I'M married, and I've got a wife livin'," continued Seth; adding hurriedly and fiercely, "don't you say nothin' to me! Don't you put me out. I'm goin' to tell you! I'm goin' to tell you all of it—all, by time! I am, if I die for it."

He was speaking so rapidly that the words were jumbled together. He knocked his hat from his forehead with a blow of his fist and actually panted for breath. Brown had never before seen him in this condition.

"Hold on! Wait," he cried. "Atkins, you needn't do this; you mustn't. I am asking no questions. We agreed to——"

"Hush up!" Seth waved both hands in the air. "*Don't* you talk! Let me get this off my chest. Good heavens alive, I've been smotherin' myself with it for years, and, now I've got started, I'll

blow off steam or my b'iler'll bust. I'm *goin'* to tell you. You listen——

"Yes, sir, I'm a married man," he went on. "I wa'n't always married, you understand. I used to be single once. Once I was single; see?"

"I see," said Brown, repressing a smile.

Seth was not aware that there was anything humorous in his statement.

"Yes," he said, "I was single and—and happy, by jiminy! I was skipper of a mack'rel schooner down Cape Ann way, never mind where, and Seth Atkins is only part of my name; never mind that, neither. I sailed that schooner and I run that schooner—I *run* her; and when I said 'boo' all hands aboard jumped, I tell you. When I've got salt water underneath me, I'm a man. But I told you that afore.

"However, this is what I didn't tell you nor nobody else in this part of the state: I stayed single till I got to be past forty. Everybody set me down as an old bach. Then I met a woman; yes, sir, I met a woman."

He made this assertion as if it was something remarkable. His companion on the bench made no comment.

"She was a widow woman," went on Seth, "and

she had a little property left her by her first husband. Owned a house and land, she did, and had some money in the bank. Some folks cal'lated I married her for that, but they cal'lated wrong. I wanted her for herself. And I got her. Her name was Emeline. I always thought Emeline was a sort of pretty name."

He sighed. Brown observed that Emeline was a very pretty name, indeed.

"Um-hm. That's what I thought, and Emeline was a real pretty woman, for her age and heft—she was fleshy. She had some consider'ble prejudice against my goin' to sea, so I agreed to stay on shore a spell and farm it, as you might say. We lived in the house she owned and was real happy together. She bossed me around a good deal, but I didn't mind bein' bossed by her. 'Twas a change, you see, for I'd always been used to bossin' other folks. So I humored her. And, bein' on land made me lose my—my grip or somethin'; 'cause I seemed to forget how to boss. But we was happy, and then—then Bennie D. come. Consarn him!"

His teeth shut with a snap, and he struck his knee with his fist. "Consarn him!" he repeated, and was silent.

The substitute assistant ventured to jog his memory.

"Who was Bennie D.?" he asked.

"What? Hey? Bennie D.? Oh, he was her brother-in-law, her husband's brother from up Boston way. He was a genius—at least, he said he was—and an inventor. The only invention I ever could l'arn he'd invented to a finish was how to live without workin', but he'd got that brought to a science. However, he was forever fussin' over some kind of machine that was sartin sure to give power to the universe, when 'twas done, and Emeline's husband—his name was Abner—thought the world and all of him. 'Fore he died he made Emeline promise to always be kind to Bennie D., and she said she would. Abner left him a little money, and he spent it travelin' 'for his health.' I don't know where he traveled to, but, wherever 'twas, the health must have been there. He was the healthiest critter ever I see—and the laziest.

"Well, his travels bein' over, down he comes to make his sister-in-law a little visit. And he stays on and stays on. He never took no shine to me—I judge he figgered I hadn't no business sharin' Abner's property—and I never took to him, much.

"Emeline noticed Bennie D. and me wa'n't fall-

in' on each other's necks any to speak of, and it troubled her. She blamed me for it. Said Bennie was a genius, and geniuses had sensitive natures and had to be treated with consideration and different from other folks. And that promise to Abner weighed on her conscience, I cal'late. Anyhow, she petted that blame inventor, and it made me mad. And yet I didn't say much—not so much as I'd ought to, I guess. And Bennie D. was always heavin' out little side remarks about Emeline's bein' fitted for better things than she was gettin', and how, when his invention was 'perfected,' *he'd* see that she didn't slave herself to death, and so on and so on. And he had consider'ble to say about folks tryin' to farm when they didn't know a cucumber from a watermelon, and how 'farmin'' was a good excuse for doin' nothin', and such. And I didn't have any good answer to that, 'cause I do know more about seaweed than I do cucumbers, and the farm wasn't payin' and I knew it.

"If he'd said these things right out plain, I guess likely I'd have give him what he deserved. But he didn't; he just hinted and smiled and acted superior and pityin'. And if I got mad and hove out a little sailor talk by accident, he'd look as sorry

and shocked as the Come-Outer parson does when there's a baby born to a Universalist family. He'd get up and shut the door, as if he was scart the neighbors' morals would suffer—though the only neighbor within hearin' was an old critter that used to run a billiard saloon in Gloucester, and *his* morals had been put out of their misery forty years afore—and he'd suggest that Emeline better leave the room, maybe. And then I'd feel ashamed and wouldn't know what to do, and 'twould end, more'n likely, by my leavin' it myself.

"You can see how matters was driftin'. I could see plain enough, and I cal'late Emeline could, too —I'll give her credit for that. She didn't begin to look as happy as she had, and that made me feel worse than ever. One time, I found her cryin' in the wash room, and I went up and put my arm round her.

"'Emeline,' I says, 'don't; please don't. Don't cry. I know I ain't the husband I'd ought to be to you, but I'm doin' my best. I'm tryin' to do it. I ain't a genius,' I says.

"She interrupted me quick, sort of half laughin' and half cryin'. 'No, Seth,' says she, 'you ain't, that's a fact.'

"That made me sort of mad. 'No, I ain't,' I

says again; 'and if you ask me, I'd say one in the house was enough, and to spare.'

"'I know you don't like Bennie,' she says.

"'Taint that,' says I, which was a lie. 'It ain't that,' I says; 'but somehow I don't seem to fit around here. Bennie and me, we don't seem to belong together.'

"'He is Abner's brother,' she says, 'and I promised Abner. *I* can't tell him to go. *I* can't tell him to leave this house, his brother's house.'

"Now, consarn it, there was another thing. It *was* Abner's house, or had been afore he died, and now 'twas hers. If I ever forgot that fact, which wa'n't by no means likely to happen, Bennie D. took occasions enough to remind me of it. So I was set back again with my canvas flappin', as you might say.

"'No,' says I, 'course you can't. He's your brother-in-law.'

"'But you are my husband,' she says, lookin' at me kind of queer. Anyhow, it seems kind of queer to me now. I've thought about that look a good deal since, and sometimes I've wondered if—if . . . However, that's all past and by.

"'Yes,' I says, pretty average bitter, 'but second husbands don't count for much.'

"'Some of 'em don't seem to, that's a fact,' she says.

"'By jiminy,' I says, '*I* don't count for much in this house.'

"'Yes?' says she. 'And whose fault is that?'

"Well, I *was* mad. 'I tell you what I *can* do,' I sings out. 'I can quit this landlubber's job where I'm nothin' but a swab, and go to sea again, where I'm some account. That's what I can do.'

"She turned and looked at me.

"'You promised me never to go to sea again,' she says.

"'Humph!' says I; 'some promises are hard to keep.'

"'I keep mine, hard or not,' says she. 'Would you go away and leave me?'

"'You've got Brother Bennie,' says I. 'He's a genius; I ain't nothin' but a man.'

"She laughed, pretty scornful. 'Are you sartin you're that?' she wanted to know.

"'Not since I been livin' here, I ain't,' I says. And that ended that try of makin' up.

"And from then on it got worse and worse. There wan't much comfort at home where the inventor was, so I took to stayin' out nights. Went down to the store and hung around, listenin' to

fools' gabble, and wishin' I was dead. And the more I stayed out, the more Bennie D. laughed and sneered and hinted. And then come that ridic'-lous business about Sarah Ann Christy. That ended it for good and all."

Seth paused in his long story and looked out across the starlit sea.

"Who was Sarah Ann?" asked Brown. The lightkeeper seemed much embarrassed.

"She was a born fool," he declared, with emphasis; "born that way and been developin' extry foolishness ever since. She was a widow, too; been good lookin' once and couldn't forget it, and she lived down nigh the store. When I'd be goin' down or comin' back, just as likely as not she was settin' on the piazza, and she'd hail me. I didn't want to stop and talk to her, of course."

"No, of course not."

"Well, I *didn't*. And I didn't *have* to talk. Couldn't if I wanted to; she done it all. Her tongue was hung on ball-bearin' hinges and was a self-winder guaranteed to run an hour steady every time she set it goin'. Talk! my jiminy crimps, how that woman could talk! I couldn't get away; I tried to, but, my soul, she wouldn't let me. And, if 'twas a warm night, she'd more'n likely have a

pitcher of lemonade or some sort of cold wash alongside, and I must stop and taste it. By time, I can taste it yet!

"Well, there wa'n't no harm in her at all; she was just a fool that had to talk to somebody, males preferred. But my stayin' out nights wasn't helpin' the joyfulness of things to home, and one evenin' —one evenin' . . . Oh, there! I started to tell you this and I might's well get it over.

"This evenin' when I came home from the store I see somethin' was extry wrong soon's I struck the settin' room. Emeline was there, and Bennie D., and I give you my word, I felt like turnin' up my coat collar, 'twas so frosty. 'Twas hotter'n a steamer's stoke-hole outside, but that room was forty below zero.

"Nobody *said* nothin', you know—that was the worst of it; but I'd have been glad if they had. Finally, I said it myself. 'Well, Emeline,' says I, 'here I be.'

"No answer, so I tried again. 'Well, Emeline,' says I, 'I've fetched port finally.'

"She didn't answer me then, but Bennie D. laughed. He had a way of laughin' that made other folks want to cry—or kill him. For choice I'd have done the killin' first.

"'More nautical conversation, sister,' says he. 'He knows how fond you are of that sort of thing.'

"You see, Emeline never did like to hear me talk sailor talk; it reminded her too much that I used to be a sailor, I s'pose. And that inventor knew she didn't like it, and so he rubbed it in every time I made a slip. 'Twas just one of his little ways; he had a million of 'em.

"But I tried once more. 'Emeline,' I says, 'I'm home. Can't you speak to me?'

"Then she looked at me. 'Yes, Seth,' says she, 'I see you are home.'

"'At last,' put in brother-in-law, '"There is no place like home"—when the other places are shut up.' And he laughed again.

"'Stop, Bennie,' says Emeline, and he stopped. That was another of his little ways—to do anything she asked him. Then she turned to me.

"'Seth,' she asks, 'where have you been?'

"'Oh, down street,' says I, casual. 'It's turrible warm out.'

"She never paid no attention to the weather signals. 'Where 'bouts down street?' she wanted to know.

"'Oh, down to the store,' I says.

"'You go to the store a good deal, don't you,' says she. Bennie D. chuckled, and then begged her pardon. That chuckle stirred my mad up.

"'I go where folks seem to be glad to see me,' I says. 'Where they treat me as if I was somebody.'

"'So you was at the store the whole evenin'?' she asks.

"'Course I was,' says I. 'Where else would I be?'

"She looked at me hard, and her face sort of set. She didn't answer, but took up the sewin' in her lap and went to work on it. I remember she dropped it once, and Bennie D. jumped to pick it up for her, quick as a wink. I set down in the rockin' chair and took the Gloucester paper. But I didn't really read. The clock ticked and ticked, and 'twas so still you could hear every stroke of the pendulum. Finally, I couldn't stand it no longer.

"'What on earth is the matter?' I sings out. 'What have I done this time? Don't you *want* me to go to the store? Is that it?'

"She put down her sewin'. 'Seth,' says she, quiet but awful cold, 'I want you to go anywheres that you want to go. I never'll stand in your

way. But I want you tell the truth about it afterwards.'

"'The truth?' says I. 'Don't I always tell you the truth?'

"'No,' says she. 'You've lied to me tonight. You've been callin' on the Christy woman, and you know it.'

"Well, you could have knocked me down with a baby's rattle. I'd forgot all about that fool Sarah Ann. I cal'late I turned nineteen different shades of red, and for a minute I couldn't think of a word to say. And Bennie D. smiled, wicked as the Old Harry himself.

"'How—how did you—how do you know I see Sarah Ann Christy?' I hollered out, soon's I could get my breath.

"'Because you were seen there,' says she.

"'Who see me?'

"'I did,' says she. 'I went down street myself, on an errand, and, bein' as you weren't here to go with me, Bennie was good enough to go. It ain't pleasant for a woman to go out alone after dark, and—and I have never been used to it,' she says.

"That kind of hurt me and pricked my conscience, as you may say.

"'You know I'd been tickled to death to go with

you, Emeline,' I says. 'Any time, you know it. But you never asked me to go with you.'

"'How long has it been since you asked to go with me?' she says.

"'Do you really want me to go anywheres, Emeline?' says I, eager. 'Do you? I s'posed you didn't. If you'd asked——'

"'Why should I always do the askin'? Must a wife always ask her husband? Doesn't the husband ever do anything on his own responsibility? Seth, I married you because I thought you was a strong, self-reliant man, who would advise me and protect me and——'

"That cussed inventor bust into the talk right here. I cal'late he thought 'twas time.

"'Excuse me, sister,' he says; 'don't humiliate yourself afore him. Remember you and me saw him tonight, saw him with our own eyes, settin' on a dark piazza with another woman. Drinkin' with her and——'

"'Drinkin'!' I yells.

"'Yes, drinkin',' says he, solemn. 'I don't wonder you are ashamed of it.'

"'Ashamed! I ain't ashamed.'

"'You hear that, sister? *Now* I hope you're convinced.'

"'Twa'n't nothin' but lemonade I was drinkin',' I hollers, pretty nigh crazy. 'She asked me to stop and have a glass 'cause 'twas so hot. And as for callin' on her, I wa'n't. I was just passin' by, and she sings out what a dreadful night 'twas, and I said 'twas, too, and she says won't I have somethin' cold to drink. That's all there was to it.'

"Afore Emeline could answer, Bennie comes back at me again.

"'Perhaps you'll tell us this was the first time you have visited her,' he purrs.

"Well, that was a sockdolager, 'cause 'twa'n't the first time. I don't know how many times 'twas. I never kept no account of 'em. Too glad to get away from her everlastin' tongue-clackin'. But when 'twas put right up to me this way, I—I declare I was all fussed up. I felt sick and I guess I looked so. Emeline was lookin' at me and seemin'ly waitin' for me to say somethin'; yet I couldn't say it. And Bennie D. laughed, quiet but wicked.

"That laugh fixed me. I swung round and lit into him.

"'You mind your own business,' I roars. 'Ain't you ashamed, makin' trouble with a man's wife in his own house?'

"'I was under the impression the house be-

longed to my sister-in-law,' he says. And again I was knocked off my pins.

"'You great big loafer!' I yelled at him; 'settin' here doin' nothin' but raisin' the divil generally! I—I——'

"He jumped as if I'd stuck a brad-awl into him. The shocked expression came across his face again, and he runs to Emeline and takes her arm.

"'Sister, sister,' he says, quick, but gentle, 'this is no place for you. Language like that is . . . there! there! don't you think you'd better leave the room?'

"She didn't go. As I remember it now, it keeps comin' back to me that she didn't go. She just stood still and looked at me. And then she says: 'Seth, why did you lie to me?'

"'I didn't lie,' I shouts. 'I forgot, I tell you. I never thought that windmill of a Christy woman was enough importance to remember. I didn't lie to you—I never did. Oh, Emeline, you know I didn't. What's the matter with you and me, anyway? We used to be all right and now we're all wrong.'

"'One of us is,' says Bennie D. That was the final straw that choked the camel.

"'Yes,' I says to him, 'that's right, one of us

is, and I don't know which. But I know this: you and I can't stay together in this house any longer.'

"I can see that room now, as 'twas when I said that. Us three lookin' at each other, and the clock a-tickin', and everything else still as still. I choked, but I kept on.

"'I mean it,' I says. 'Either you clear out of this house or I do.'

"And, while the words was on my lips, again it came to me strong that it wa'n't really my house at all. I turned to my wife.

"'Emeline,' says I, 'it's got to be. You must tell him to go, or else——'

"She'd been lookin' at me again with that kind of queer look in her eyes, almost a hopeful look, seem's if 'twas, and yet it couldn't have been, of course. Now she drawed a long breath.

"'I can't tell him to go, Seth,' says she. 'I promised to give him a home as long as I had one.'

"I set my jaws together. 'All right,' I says; 'then *I'm* goin'. Good by.'

"And I went. Yes, sir, I went. Just as I was, without any hat or dunnage of any kind. When I slammed the back door it seemed as if I heard her sing out my name. I waited, but I guess I was mis-

taken, for she didn't call it again. And—and I never set eyes on her since. No, sir, not once."

The lightkeeper stopped. John Brown said nothing, but he laid a hand sympathetically on the older man's shoulder. Seth shuddered, straightened, and went on.

"I cleared out of that town that very night," he said. "Walked clear into Gloucester, put up at a tavern there till mornin', and then took the cars to Boston. I cal'lated fust that I'd ship as mate or somethin' on a foreign voyage, but I couldn't; somehow I couldn't bring myself to do it. You see, I'd promised her I wouldn't ever go to sea again, and so—well, I was a dum idiot, I s'pose, but I wouldn't break the promise. I knew the superintendent of lighthouses in this district, and I'd been an assistant keeper when I was younger. I told him my yarn, and he told me about this job. I changed my name, passed the examination and come directly here. And here I've stayed ever since."

He paused again. Brown ventured to ask another question.

"And your—and the lady?" he asked. "Where is she?"

"I don't know. Livin' in her house back there

on Cape Ann, I s'pose. She was, last I knew. I never ask no questions. I want to forget—to forget, by time! . . . Hi hum! . . . Well, now you know what nobody this side of Boston knows. And you can understand why I'm willin' to be buried alive down here. 'Cause a woman wrecked my life; I'm done with women; and to this forsaken hole no women scarcely ever come. But, when they *do* come, you must understand that I expect you to show 'em round. After hearin' what I've been through, I guess you'll be willin' to do that much for me."

He rose, evidently considering the affair settled. Brown stroked his chin.

"I'm sorry, Atkins," he observed, slowly; "and I certainly do sympathize with you. But—but, as I said, 'I guess you'll have to hire another boy!'"

"What? What do you mean?"

"I mean that you're not the only woman-hater on the beach."

"Hey? Has a woman given *you* the go by?"

"No. The other way around, if anything. Look here, Atkins! I'm not in the habit of discussing my private affairs with acquaintances, but you've been frank with me—and well, hang it! I've

got to talk to somebody. At least, I feel that way just now. Let's suppose a case. Suppose you were a young fellow not long out of college—a young fellow whose mother was dead and whose dad was rich, and head over heels in money-making, and with the idea that his will was no more to be disputed than a law of the Almighty. Just suppose that, will you?"

"Huh! Well, 'twill be hard supposin', but I'll try. Heave ahead."

"Suppose that you'd never been used to working or supporting yourself. Had a position, a nominal one, in your dad's office but absolutely no responsibility, all the money you wanted, and so on. Suppose because your father wanted you to—and *her* people felt the same—you had become engaged to a girl, a nice enough girl, too, in her way. But then suppose that little by little you came to realize that her way wasn't yours. You and she liked each other well enough, but the whole thing was a family arrangement, a money arrangement, a perfectly respectable, buy-and-sell affair. That and nothing else. And the more you thought about it, the surer you felt that it was so. But when you told your governor he got on his ear and sailed into you, and you sailed back, until finally he swore that you

should either marry that girl or he'd throw you out of his house and office to root for yourself. What would you do?"

"Hey? Land sakes! I don't know. *I* always *had* to root, so I ain't a competent judge. Go on, you've got me interested."

"Well, I said I'd root, that's all. But I didn't have the nerve to go and tell the girl. The engagement had been announced, and all that, and I knew what a mess it would make for her. I sat in my room, among the things I was packing in my grip to take with me, and thought and thought. If I went to her there would be a scene. If I said I had been disinherited she would want to know why—naturally. I had quarreled with the governor—yes, but why? Then I should have to tell her the real reason: I didn't want to marry her or anybody else on such a bargain-counter basis. That seemed such a rotten thing to say, and she might ask why it had taken me such a long time to find it out. No, I just *couldn't* tell her that. So, after my think was over, I wrote her a note saying that my father and I had had a disagreement and he had chucked me out, or words to that effect. Naturally, under the circumstances, marriage was out of the question, and I released her from the engagement.

Good by and good luck—or something similar. I mailed the letter and left the town the next morning."

He paused. The lightkeeper made no comment. After a moment the young man continued.

"I landed in Boston," he said, "full of conceit and high-minded ideas of working my own way up the ladder. But in order to work up, you've got to get at least a hand-hold on the bottom rung. I couldn't get it. Nobody wanted a genteel loafer, which was me. My money gave out. I bought a steamboat passage to another city, but I didn't have enough left to buy a square meal. Then, by bull luck, I fell overboard and landed here. And here I found the solution. I'm dead. If the governor gets soft-hearted and gets private detectives on my trail, they'll find I disappeared from that steamer, that's all. Drowned, of course. *She'll* think so, too. 'Good riddance to bad rubbish' is the general verdict. I can stay here a year or so, and then, being dead and forgotten, can go back to civilization and hustle for myself. *But* a woman is at the bottom of my trouble, and I never want to see another. So, if my staying here depends upon my seeing them, I guess, as I've said twice already, 'you'll have to hire another boy.'"

He, too, rose. Seth laid a big hand on his shoulder.

"Son," said the lightkeeper, "I'm sorry for you; I cal'late I know how you feel. I like you fust-rate, and if it's a possible thing, I'll fix it so's you can stay right here long's you want to. As for women folks that do come—why, we'll dodge 'em if we can, and share responsibility if we must. But there's one thing you've *got* to understand. You're young, and maybe your woman hate'll wear off. If it does, out you go. I can't have any sparkin' or lovemakin' around these premises."

The assistant snorted contemptuously.

"If ever you catch me being even coldly familiar with a female of any age," he declared, "I hereby request that you hit me, politely, but firmly, with that axe," pointing to the kindling hatchet leaning against the door post.

Seth chuckled. "Good stuff!" he exclaimed. "And, for my part, if ever you catch me gettin' confectionery with a woman, I . . . well, don't stop to pray over me; just drown me, that's all I ask. It's a bargain. Shake!"

So they shook, with great solemnity.

CHAPTER VIII

NEIGHBORS AND WASPS

AND now affairs at the lights settled down into a daily routine in which the light-keeper and his helper each played his appointed part. All mysteries now being solved, and the trust between them mutual and without reserve, they no longer were on their guard in each other's presence, but talked freely on all sorts of topics, and expressed their mutual dislike of woman with frequency and point. No regular assistant was appointed or seemed likely to be, for the summer, at least. Seth and his friend, the superintendent, held another lengthy conversation over the wire, and, while Brown's uncertain status remained the same, there was a tacit understanding that, by the first of September, if the young man was sufficiently "broken in," the position vacated by Ezra Payne should be his—if he still wanted it.

"You may change your mind by that time," ob-

served Seth. "This ain't no place for a chap with your trainin', and I know it. It does well enough for an old derelict like me, with nobody to care a hang whether he lives or dies, but you're different. And even for me the lonesomeness of it drives me 'most crazy sometimes. I've noticed you've been havin' blue streaks more often than when you first came. I cal'late that by fall you'll be headin' somewheres else, Mr. 'John Brown,'" with significant emphasis upon the name.

Brown stoutly denied being "bluer" than usual, and his superior did not press the point. Seth busied himself in his spare time with the work on the *Daisy M.* and with his occasional trips behind Joshua to the village. Brown might have made some of these trips, but he did not care to. Solitude and seclusion he still desired, and there were more of these than anything else at the Twin-Lights.

The lightkeeper experimented with no more dogs, but he had evidently not forgotten the life-saving man's warning concerning possible thieves, for he purchased a big spring-lock in Eastboro and attached it to the door of the boathouse on the little wharf. The lock was, at first, a good deal more of a nuisance than an advantage, for the key

was always being forgotten or mislaid, and, on one occasion, the door blew shut with Atkins inside the building, and he pounded and shrieked for ten minutes before his helper heard him and descended to the rescue.

June crawled by, and July came. Crawled is the proper word, for John Brown had never known days so long or weeks so unending as those of that early summer. The monotony was almost never broken, and he began to find it deadly. He invented new duties about the lights and added swimming and walks up and down the beach to his limited list of recreations.

The swimming he especially enjoyed. The cove made a fine bathing place, and the boathouse was his dressing room, though the fragrance of the ancient fish nets stored within it was not that of attar of roses. A cheap bathing suit was one of the luxuries Atkins had bought for him, by request, in Eastboro. Seth bought the suit under protest, for he scoffed openly at his helper's daily bath.

"I should think," the lightkeeper declared over and over again, "that you'd had salt water soak enough to last you for one spell; a feller that come as nigh drownin' as you done!"

Seth did not care for swimming; the wash-

tub every Saturday night furnished him with baths sufficient.

He was particular to warn his helper against the tide in the inlet: "The cove's all right," he said, "but you want to look out and not try to swim in the crick where it's narrow, or in that deep hole by the end of the wharf, where the lobster car's moored. When the tide's comin' in or it's dead high water, the current's strong there. On the ebb it'll snake you out into the breakers sure as I'm settin' here tellin' you. The cove's all right and good and safe; but keep away from the narrer part of the crick."

Swimming was good fun, and walking, on pleasant days, was an aid in shaking off depression; but, in spite of his denials and his attempts at appearing contented, the substitute assistant realized that he was far from that happy condition. He did not want to meet people, least of all people of his own station in life—his former station. Atkins was a fine chap, in his way; but . . . Brown was lonely . . . and when one is lonely, one thinks of what might have been, and, perhaps, regrets. Regrets, unavailing regrets, are the poorest companions possible.

The lightkeeper, too, seemed lonely, which, con-

sidering his years of experience in his present situation, was odd. He explained his loneliness one evening by observing that he cal'lated he missed the painting chaps.

"What painting chaps?" asked Brown.

"Oh, them two young fellers that always used to come to the cottage—what you call the bungalow—across the cove there, the ones I told you about. They was real friendly, sociable young chaps, and I kind of liked to have 'em runnin' in and out. Seems queer to have it July, and they not here to hail me and come over to borrow stuff. And they was forever settin' around under white sunshades, sloppin' paint onto paper. I most wish they hadn't gone to Europe. I cal'late you'd have liked 'em, too."

"Perhaps," said the helper, doubtfully.

"Oh, you would; no perhaps about it. It don't seem right to see the bungalow all shuttered up and deserted this time of year. You'd have liked to meet them young painters; they was your kind."

"Yes, I know. Perhaps that's why I shouldn't like to meet them."

"Hey? . . . Oh, yes, yes; I see. I never thought of that. But 'tain't likely they'd know you; they hailed from Boston, not New York."

"How did you know I came from New York? I didn't tell you that."

"No, you didn't, that's a fact. But you said you left the city where you lived and came to Boston, so I sort of guessed New York. But that's all right; I don't know and I don't care. Names and places you and me might just as well not tell, even to each other. If we don't tell them, we can answer 'don't know' to questions and tell the truth; hey?"

One morning about a week later, Brown, his dish washing and sweeping done, was busy in the light-room at the top of the right hand tower, polishing the brass of the lantern. The curtains were drawn on the landward side, and those toward the sea open. Seth, having finished his night watching and breakfast, was audibly asleep in the house. Brown rubbed and polished leisurely, his thoughts far away, and a frown on his face. For the thousandth time that week he decided that he was a loafer and a vagabond, and that it would have been much better for himself, and creation generally, if he had never risen after the plunge over the steamer's rail.

He pulled the cloth cover over the glittering lantern and descended the iron stair to the ground

floor. When he emerged into the open air, he heard a sound which made him start and listen. The sound was the distant rattle of wheels from the direction of the village. Was another "picnic" coming? He walked briskly to the corner of the house and peered down the winding road. A carriage was in sight certainly, but it was going, not coming. He watched it move further away each moment. Someone—not the grocer or a tradesman—was driving to the village. But where had he been, and who was he? Not Seth, for Seth was asleep—he could hear him.

The driver of the carriage, whoever he was, had not visited the lights. And, as Atkins had said, there was nowhere else to go on that road. Brown, puzzled, looked about him, at the sea, the lights, the house, the creek, the cove, the bluff on the other side of the cove, the bungalow—ah! the bungalow!

For the door of the bungalow was open, and one or two of the shutters were down. The carriage had brought some person or persons to the bungalow and left them there. Instantly, of course, Brown thought of the artists from Boston. Probably they had changed their minds and decided to summer at Eastboro after all. His frown deepened.

Then, from across the cove, from the bungalow, came a shrill scream, a feminine scream. The assistant started, scarcely believing his ears. Before he could gather his wits, a stout woman, with a checked apron in her hand, rushed out of the bungalow door, looked about, saw him, and waved the apron like a flag.

"Hi!" she screamed. "Hi, you! Mr. Lighthouseman! come quick! do please come here quick and help us!"

There was but one thing to do, and Brown did it instinctively. He raced through the beach grass, down the hill, in obedience to the call. As he ran, he wondered who on earth the stout woman could be. Seth had said that the artists did their own housekeeping.

"Hurry up!" shrieked the stout woman, dancing an elephantine fandango in front of the bungalow. "Come *on!*"

To run around the shore line of the cove would have taken a good deal of time. However, had the tide been at flood there would have been no other way—excepting by boat—to reach the cottage. But the tide was out, and the narrowest portion of the creek, the stream connecting the cove with the ocean, was but knee deep. Through the water

splashed the substitute assistant and clambered up the bank beyond.

"Quick!" screamed the woman. "They'll eat us alive!"

"Who? What?" panted Brown.

"Wasps! They're in there! The room's full of 'em. If there's one thing on earth I'm scart of, it's . . . Don't stop to talk! Go *in!*"

She indicated the door of a room adjoining the living room of the little cottage. From behind the door came sounds of upsetting furniture and sharp slaps. Evidently the artists were having a lively time. But they must be curious chaps to be afraid of wasps. Brown opened the door and entered, partly of his own volition, partly because he was pushed by the stout woman. Then he gasped in astonishment.

The wasps were there, dozens of them, and they had built a nest in the upper corner of the room. But they were not the astonishing part of the picture. A young woman was there, also; a young woman with dark hair and eyes, the sleeves of a white shirtwaist rolled above her elbows, and a wet towel in her right hand. She was skipping lightly about the room, slapping frantically at the humming insects.

"Mrs. Bascom," she panted, "don't stand there screaming. Get another towel and—"

Then she turned and saw Brown. For an instant she, too, seemed astonished. But only for an instant.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came!" she exclaimed. "Here! take this! you must hit quick and *hard*."

"This" was the towel. The assistant took it mechanically. The young lady did not wait to give further orders. She rushed out of the room and shut the door. Brown was alone with the wasps, and they were lively company. When, at last, the battle was over, the last wasp was dead, the nest was a crumpled gray heap over in the corner, and the assistant's brow was ornamented with four red and smarting punctures, which promised to shortly become picturesque and painful lumps. Rubbing these absently with one hand, and bearing the towel in the other, he opened the door and stepped out into the adjoining room.

The two women were awaiting him. He found them standing directly in front of him as he emerged.

"Have you—have you killed them?" begged the younger of the pair.

"Be they all dead?" demanded the other.

Brown nodded solemnly. "I guess so," he said. "They seem to be."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried the dark haired girl. "I'm—we—are so much obliged to you."

"If there's any critters on earth," declared the stout woman, "that I can't stand, it's wasps and hornets and such. Mice, I don't mind——"

"I do," interrupted her companion with emphasis.

"But when I walked into that room and seen that nest in the corner I was pretty nigh knocked over—and," she added, "it takes consider'ble to do that to *me.*"

The assistant looked at her. "Yes," he said, absently, "I should think it might. That is, I mean—I—I beg your pardon."

He paused and wiped his forehead with the towel. The young lady burst into a peal of laughter, in which the stout woman joined. The laugh was so infectious that even Brown was obliged to smile.

"I apologize," he stammered. "I didn't mean that exactly as it sounded. I'm not responsible mentally—yet—I guess."

"I don't wonder." It was the stout woman who answered. The girl had turned away and was

looking out the window; her shoulders shook. "I shouldn't think you would be. Hauled in bodily, as you might say, and shut up in a room to fight wasps! And by folks you never saw afore and don't know from Adam! You needn't apologize. I'd forgive you if you said somethin' a good deal worse'n that. I'm long past the age where I'm sensitive about my weight, thank goodness."

"And we *are* so much obliged to you." The girl was facing him once more, and she was serious, though the corners of her mouth still twitched. "The whole affair is perfectly ridiculous," she said, "but Mrs. Bascom was frightened and so was I—when I had time to realize it. Thank you again."

"You're quite welcome, I'm sure. No trouble at all."

The assistant turned to go. His brain was beginning to regain a little of its normal poise, and he was dimly conscious that he had been absent from duty quite long enough.

"Maybe you'd like to know who 'tis you've helped," observed the stout woman. "And, considerin' that we're likely to be next-door neighbors for a spell, I cal'late introductions are the proper thing. My name's Bascom. I'm housekeeper for Miss Ruth Graham. This is Miss Graham."

The young lady offered a hand. Brown took it.

"Graham?" he repeated. "Where?" Then, remembering a portion of what Seth had told him, he added, "I see! the—the artist?"

"My brother is an artist. He and his friend, Mr. Hamilton, own this bungalow. They are abroad this summer, and I am going to camp here for a few weeks—Mrs. Bascom and I. I paint a little, too, but only for fun."

Brown murmured a conventionality concerning his delight at meeting the pair, and once more headed for the door. But Mrs. Bascom's curiosity would not permit him to escape so easily.

"I thought," she said, "when I see you standin' over there by the lights, that you must be one of the keepers. Not the head keeper—I knew you wa'n't him—but an assistant, maybe. But I guess you're only a visitor, Mister—Mister——?"

"Brown."

"Yes, Mr. Brown. I guess you ain't no keeper, are you?"

"I am the assistant keeper at present. Yes."

"You don't say!" Mrs. Bascom looked surprised. So, too, did Miss Graham. "You don't look like a lighthouse keeper," continued the former. Oh, I don't mean your clothes!" notic-

ing the young man's embarrassed glance at his wet and far from immaculate garments. "I mean the way you talk and act. You ain't been here long, have you?"

"No."

"Just come this summer?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. You ain't a Cape Codder?"

"No."

"I was sure you wa'n't. Where *do* you come from?"

Brown hesitated. Miss Graham, noticing his hesitation, hastened to end the inquisition.

"Mr. Brown can't stop to answer questions, Mrs. Bascom," she said. "I'm sure he wants to get back to his work. Good morning, Mr. Brown. No doubt we shall see each other often, being the only neighbors in sight. Call again—do. I solemnly promise that you shall have to fight no more wasps."

"Say!" The stout woman took a step forward. "Speakin' of wasps . . . stand still a minute, Mr. Brown, won't you. What's them lumps on your forehead? Why, I do believe you've been bit. You have, sure and sartin!"

Miss Graham was very much concerned. "Oh,

no!" she exclaimed; "I hope not. Let me see."

"No, indeed!" The assistant was on the step by this time and moving rapidly. "Nothing at all. No consequence. Good morning."

He almost ran down the hill and crossed the creek at the wading place. As he splashed through, the voice of the housekeeper reached his ears.

"Cold mud's the best thing," she screamed. "Put it on thick. It takes out the smart. Good and thick, mind!"

For the next hour or two the lightkeeper's helper moved about his household tasks in a curious frame of mind. He was thoroughly angry—or thought he was—and very much disturbed. Neighbors of any kind were likely to be a confounded nuisance, but two women! Heavens! And the stout woman was sure to be running in for calls and to borrow things. As for the other, she seemed a nice girl enough, but he never wanted to see another girl, nice or otherwise. Her eyes were pretty, so was her hair, but what of it? Oh, hang the luck! Just here he banged his swollen forehead on the sharp edge of the door, and found relief in profanity.

Seth Atkins was profane, also, when he heard

the news. Brown said nothing until his superior discovered with his own eyes that the bungalow was open. Then, in answer to the lightkeeper's questions, came the disclosure of the truth.

"Women!" roared Seth. "You say there's two *women* goin' to live there? By Judas! I don't believe it!"

"Go and see for yourself, then," was the brusque answer.

"I sha'n't, neither. Who told you?"

"They did."

"They *did?* Was you there?"

"Yes."

"What for? I thought you swore never to go nigh a woman again."

"I did, but—well, it wasn't my fault. I——"

"Yes? Go on."

"I went because I couldn't help myself. Went to help some one else, in fact. I expected to find Graham and that other artist. But——"

"Well, go *on.*"

"I was stung," said Mr. Brown, gloomily, and rubbed his forehead.

CHAPTER IX

THE BUNGALOW GIRL

DURING the following day the occupants of the lightkeeper's dwelling saw little or nothing of the newcomers at the bungalow. Brown, his forehead resembling a section of a relief map of the Rocky Mountains, remained indoors as much as possible, working when there was anything to do, and reading back-number magazines when there was not. Seth went, as usual, to his room soon after noon. His slumbers must, however, have been fitful ones, for several times the substitute assistant, turning quickly, saw the bedroom door swing silently shut. The third time that this happened he ran to the door and threw it open in season to catch Mr. Atkins in an undignified dive for the bed. A tremendous snore followed the dive. The young man regarded him in silence for a few moments, during which the snores continued. Then he shook his head.

"Humph!" he soliloquized; "I must 'phone for the doctor at once. Either the doctor or the superintendent. If he has developed that habit, he isn't fit for this job."

He turned away. The slumberer stirred uneasily, rolled over, opened one eye, and sat up.

"Hi!" he called. "Come back here! Where you goin'?"

Brown returned, looking surprised and anxious.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "are you awake?"

"Course I'm awake! What a fool question that is. Think I'm settin' up here and talkin' in my sleep?"

"Well, I didn't know."

"Why didn't you know? And, see here! what did you mean by sayin' you was goin' to 'phone the doctor or the superintendent, one or t'other? Yes, you said it. I heard you."

"Oh, no! you didn't."

"Tell you I did. Heard you with my own ears."

"But how could you? You weren't awake."

"Course I was awake! Couldn't have heard you unless I was, could I? What ails you? Them stings go clear through to your brains, did they?"

Again Brown shook his head.

"This is dreadful!" he murmured. "He walks in his sleep, and snores when he's awake. I *must* call the doctor."

"What—what——" The lightkeeper's wrath was interfering with his utterance. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and sputtered incoherently.

"Be calm, Atkins," coaxed the assistant. "Don't complicate your diseases by adding heart trouble. Three times today I've caught you peeping at me through the crack of that door. Within fifteen seconds of the last peep I find you snoring. Therefore, I say——"

"Aw, belay! I was only—only just lookin' out to see what time it was."

"But you must have done it in your sleep, because——"

"I never. I was wide awake as you be."

"But why did you snore? You couldn't have fallen asleep between the door and the bed. And you hadn't quite reached the bed when I got here."

"I—I—I—Aw, shut up!"

Brown smiled blandly. "I will," he said, "provided you promise to keep this door shut and don't do any more spying."

"Spyin'? What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said. You and I had a discussion concerning that same practice when I fell over the bank at the Slough a while ago. I was not spying then, but you thought I was, and you didn't like it. Now I think you are, and *I* don't like it."

"Wh—what—what would I be spyin' on you for? Wh—what reason would I have for doin' it?"

"No good reason; because I have no intention of visiting our new neighbors—none whatever. That being understood, perhaps you'll shut the door and keep it shut."

Seth looked sheepish and guilty.

"Well," he said, after a moment's reflection, "I beg your pardon. But I couldn't help feelin' kind of uneasy. I—I ought to know better, I s'pose; but, with a young, good-lookin' girl landed unexpected right next to us, I—I——"

"How did you know she was good-looking? I didn't mention her looks."

"No, you didn't, but—but . . . John Brown, I've been young myself, and I know that at your age most *any* girl's good-lookin'. There!"

He delivered this bit of wisdom with emphasis and a savage nod of the head. Brown had no answer ready, that is, no relevant answer.

"You go to bed and shut the door," he repeated, turning to go.

"All right, I will. But don't you forget our agreement."

"I have no intention of forgetting it."

"What *are* you goin' to do?"

"Do? What do you mean?"

"I mean what are you goin' to do now that things down here's changed, and you and me ain't alone, same as we was?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure that I sha'n't leave —clear out."

"What? Clear out? Run away and leave me alone to—to . . . By time! I didn't think you was a deserter."

The substitute assistant laughed bitterly. "You needn't worry," he said. "I couldn't go far, even if I wanted to. I haven't any money."

"That's so." Seth was evidently relieved. "All right," he observed; "don't you worry. 'Twon't be but a couple of months anyway, and we'll fight it through together. But ain't it a shame! Ain't it an everlastin' shame that this had to happen just as we'd come to understand each other and was so contented and friendly! Well, there's only one thing to do; that's to make the

best of it for us and the worst for them. We'll keep to ourselves and pay no attention to 'em no more'n if they wa'n't there. We'll forget 'em altogether; hey? . . . I say we'll forget 'em altogether, won't we?"

Brown's answer was short and sharp.

"Yes," he said, and slammed the door behind him. Seth slowly shook his head before he laid it on the pillow. He was not entirely easy in his mind, even yet.

However, there was no more spying, and the lightkeeper did not mention the bungalow tenants when he appeared at supper time. After the meal he bolted to the lights, and was on watch in the tower when his helper retired.

Early the next afternoon Brown descended the path to the boathouse. He had omitted his swim the day before. Now, however, he intended to have it. Simply because those female nuisances had seen fit to intrude where they had no business was no reason why he should resign all pleasure. He gave a quick glance upward at the opposite bank as he reached the wharf. There was no sign of life about the bungalow.

He entered the boathouse, undressed, and donned his bathing suit. In a few minutes he was

ready, and, emerging upon the wharf, walked briskly back along the shore of the creek to where it widened into the cove. There he plunged in, and was soon luxuriating in the cool, clear water.

He swam with long, confident strokes, those of a practiced swimmer. This was worth while. It was the one place where he could forget that he was no longer the only son of a wealthy father, heir to a respected name—which was *not* Brown—a young man with all sorts of brilliant prospects; could forget that he was now a disinherited vagabond, a loafer who had been unable to secure a respectable position, an outcast. He swam and dove and splashed, rejoicing in his strength and youth and the freedom of all outdoors.

Then, as he lay lazily paddling in deep water, he heard the rattle of gravel on the steep bank of the other side of the cove. Looking up, he saw, to his huge disgust, a female figure in a trim bathing suit descending the bluff from the bungalow. It was the girl who had left him to fight the wasps. Her dark hair was covered with a jauntily tied colored handkerchief, and, against the yellow sand of the bluff, she made a very pretty picture. Not that Brown was interested, but she did, nevertheless.

She saw him and waved a hand. "Good morn-

ing," she called. "Beautiful day for a swim, isn't it?"

"Yes," growled the young man, brusquely. He turned and began to swim in the opposite direction, up the cove. The girl looked after him, raised a puzzled eyebrow, and then, with a shrug, waded into the water. The next time the assistant looked at her, she was swimming with long, sweeping strokes down the narrow creek to the bend and the deep hole at the end of the wharf. Round that bend and through that hole the tide whirled, like a rapid, out into the miniature bay behind Black Man's Point. It was against that tide that Seth Atkins had warned him.

And the girl was swimming directly toward the dangerous narrows. Brown growled an exclamation of disgust. He had no mind to continue the acquaintance, and yet he couldn't permit her to do that.

"Miss Graham!" he called. "Oh, Miss Graham!"

She heard him, but did not stop.

"Yes?" she called in answer, continuing to swim. "What is it?"

"You mustn't—" shouted Brown. Then he remembered that he must not shout. Shouting

might awaken the lightkeeper, and the latter would misunderstand the situation, of course. So he cut his warning to one word.

"Wait!" he called, and began swimming toward her. She did not come to meet him, but merely ceased swimming and turned on her back to float. And, floating, the tide would carry her on almost as rapidly as if she assisted it. That tide did not need any assistance. Brown swung on his side and settled into the racing stroke, the stroke which had won him cups at the athletic club.

He reached her in a time so short that she was surprised into an admiring comment.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "you *can* swim!"

He did not thank her for the compliment. There was no time for that, even if he had felt like it.

"You shouldn't be here," he said sharply.

She looked at him.

"Why, what do you mean?" she demanded.

"It isn't safe. A little farther, and the tide would carry you out to sea. Come back, back up to the cove at once."

He expected her to ask more questions, but she did not. Instead she turned and struck out in si-

lence. Against the tide, even there, the pull was tremendous.

"Shall I help you?" he asked.

"No, I can make it."

And she did. It was his turn to be surprised into admiration.

"By Jove!" he panted, as they swung into the quiet water of the cove and stood erect in the shallows, "that was great! You are a good swimmer."

"Thank you," she answered, breathlessly. "It *was* a tug, wasn't it? Thank you for warning me. Now tell me about the dangerous places, please."

He told her, repeating Seth's tales of the tide's strength.

"But it is safe enough here?" she asked.

"Oh, yes! perfectly safe anywhere this side of the narrow part—the creek."

"I'm so glad. This water is glorious, and I began to be afraid I should have to give it up."

"The creek, and even the bay itself are safe enough at flood," he went on. "I often go there then. When the tide is coming in it is all right even for——"

He paused. She finished the sentence for him. "Even for a girl, you were going to say." She waded forward to where the shoal ended and the

deeper part began. There she turned to look at him over her shoulder.

"I'm going to that beach over there," she said, pointing across the cove. "Do you want to race?"

Without waiting to see whether he did or not, she struck out for the beach. And, without stopping to consider why he did it, the young man followed her.

The race was not so one-sided. Brown won it by some yards, but he had to work hard. His competitor did not give up when she found herself falling behind, but was game to the end.

"Well," she gasped, "you beat me, didn't you? I never could get that side stroke, and it's ever so much faster."

"It's simple enough. Just a knack. I'll teach you if you like."

"Will you? That's splendid."

"You are the strongest swimmer, Miss Graham, for a girl, that I ever saw. You must have practiced a great deal."

"Yes, Horace—my brother—taught me. He is a splendid swimmer, one of the very best."

"Horace Graham? Why, you don't mean Horace Graham of the Harvard Athletic?"

"Yes, I do. He is my brother. But how . . . Do you know him?"

The surprise in her tone was evident. Brown bit his lip. He remembered that Cape Cod lightkeepers' helpers were not, as a usual thing, supposed to be widely acquainted in college athletic circles.

"I have met him," he stammered.

"But where—" she began; and then, "why, of course! you met him here. I forgot that he has been your neighbor for three summers."

The assistant had forgotten it, too, but he was thankful for the reminder.

"Yes. Yes, certainly," he said. She regarded him with a puzzled look.

"It's odd he didn't mention you," she observed. "He has told me a great deal about the bungalow, and the sea views, and the loneliness and the quaintness of it all. That was what made me wish to spend a month down here and experience it myself. And he has often spoken," with an irrepressible smile, "of your—of the lightkeeper, Mr. Atkins. That is his name, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I want to meet him. Horace said he was—well, rather odd, but, when you knew him, a fine

fellow and full of dry humor. I'm sure I should like him."

Brown smiled, also—and broadly. He mentally pictured Seth's reception of the news that he was "liked" by the young lady across the cove. And then it occurred to him, with startling suddenness, that he had been conversing very familiarly with that young lady, notwithstanding the solemn interchange of vows between the lightkeeper and himself.

"I must be going," he said hastily; "good morning, Miss Graham."

He waded to the shore and strode rapidly back toward the boathouse. His companion called after him.

"I shall expect you to-morrow afternoon," she said. "You've promised to teach me that side stroke, remember."

Brown dressed in a great hurry and climbed the path to the lights at the double quick. All was safe and serene in the house, and he breathed more freely. Atkins was sound asleep, really asleep, in the bedroom, and when he emerged he was evidently quite unaware of his helper's unpremeditated treason. Brown's conscience pricked him, however, and he went to bed that night vowing

over and over that he would be more careful thereafter. He would take care not to meet the Graham girl again. Having reached this decision, there remained nothing but to put her out of his mind entirely; which he succeeded in doing at a quarter after eleven, when he fell asleep. Even then she was not entirely absent, for he dreamed a ridiculous dream about her.

Next day he did not go for a swim, but remained in the house. Seth, at supper, demanded to know what ailed him.

"You're as mum as the oldest inhabitant of a deaf and dumb asylum," was the lightkeeper's comment. "And ugly as a bull in fly time. What ails you?"

"Nothing."

"Humph! better take somethin' for it, seems to me. Little 'Stomach Balm,' hey? No? Well, *go* to bed! Your room's enough sight better'n your company just now."

The helper's ill nature was in evidence again at breakfast time. Seth endeavored to joke him out of it, but, not succeeding, and finding his best jokes received with groans instead of laughter, gave it up in disgust and retired. The young man cleared the table, piled the dishes in the

sink, heated a kettleful of water and began the day's drudgery, drudgery which he once thought was fun.

Why had he had the ill luck to fall overboard from that steamer. Or why didn't he drown when he did fall overboard? Then he would have been comfortably dead, at all events. Why hadn't he stayed in New York or Boston or somewhere and kept on trying for a position, for work—any kind of work? He might have starved while trying, but people who were starving were self-respecting, and when they met other people—for instance, sisters of fellows they used to know—had nothing to be ashamed of and needn't lie—unless they wanted to. He was a common loafer, under a false name, down on a sandheap washing dishes. At this point he dropped one of the dishes—a plate—and broke it.

"D—n!" observed John Brown, under his breath, but with enthusiasm.

He stooped to pick up the fragments of the plate, and, rising once more to an erect position, found himself facing Miss Ruth Graham. She was standing in the doorway.

"Don't mind me, please," she said. "No doubt I should feel the same way if it were my plate."

"'Don't mind me, please,' she said."

The young man's first move, after recovery, was to make sure that the door between the kitchen and the hall leading to the lightkeeper's bedroom was shut. It was, fortunately. The young lady watched him in silence, though her eyes were shining.

"Good morning, Mr. Brown," she observed, gravely.

The assistant murmured a good morning, from force of habit.

"There's another piece you haven't picked up," continued the visitor, pointing.

Brown picked up the piece.

"Is Mr. Atkins in?" inquired the girl.

"Yes, he's—he's in."

"May I see him, please?"

"I—I——"

"If he's busy, I can wait." She seated herself in a chair. "Don't let me interrupt you," she continued. "You were busy, too, weren't you?"

"I was washing dishes," declared Brown, savagely.

"Oh!"

"Yes. Washing and sweeping and doing scrubwoman's work are my regular employments."

"Indeed! Then I'm just in time to help. Is this the dish towel?" regarding it dubiously.

"It is, but I don't need any help, thank you."

"Of course you do. Everyone is glad to be helped at doing dishes. I may as well make myself useful while I'm waiting for Mr. Atkins."

She picked up a platter and proceeded to wipe it, quite as a matter of course. Brown, swearing inwardly, turned fiercely to the suds.

"Did you wish to see Atkins on particular business?" he asked, a moment later.

"Oh, no; I wanted to make his acquaintance, that's all. Horace told me so many interesting things about him. By the way, was it last summer, or the summer before, that you met my brother here?"

No answer. Miss Graham repeated her question. "Was it last summer or the summer before?" she asked.

"Oh—er—I don't remember. Last summer, I think."

"Why, you must remember. How could any one forget anything that happened down here? So few things do happen, I should say. So you met him last summer?"

"Yes."

"Hum! that's odd."

"Shall I call Atkins? He's in his room."

"I say it is odd, because, when Mrs. Bascom and I first met you, you told us this was your first summer here."

There wasn't any answer to this; at least the assistant could think of none at the moment.

"Do you wish me to call Atkins?" he asked, sharply. "He's asleep, but I can wake him."

"Oh! he's asleep. Now I understand why you whisper even when you sw— that is, when you break a plate. You were afraid of waking him. How considerate you are."

Brown put down the dishcloth. "It isn't altogether consideration for him—or for myself," he said grimly. "I didn't care to wake him unless you took the responsibility."

"Why?"

"Because, Miss Graham, Seth Atkins took the position of lightkeeper here almost for the sole reason that no women ever came here. Mr. Atkins is a woman-hater of the most rabid type. I'll wake him up if you wish, but I won't be responsible for the consequences."

The young lady stared at him in surprise, delighted surprise apparently, judging by the expression of her face.

"A woman-hater?" she repeated. "Is he really?"

"He is." Mr. Brown neglected to add that he also had declared himself a member of the same fraternity. Perhaps he thought it was not necessary.

"A woman-hater!" Miss Graham fairly bubbled with mischievous joy. "Oh, jolly! now I'm *crazy* to meet him!"

The assistant moved toward the hall door. "Very good!" he observed with grim determination. "I think he'll cure your lunacy."

His hand was outstretched toward the latch, when the young lady spoke again.

"Wait a minute," she said. "Perhaps I had better not wake him now."

"Just as you say. The pleasure is—or will be —entirely mine, I assure you."

"No—o. On the whole, I think I'll wait until later. I may call again. Good morning."

She moved across the threshold. Then, standing on the mica slab which was the step to the kitchen door, she turned to say:

"You didn't swim yesterday."

"No—o. I—I was busy."

"I see."

She paused, as if expecting him to say something further on the subject. He was silent. Her manner changed.

"Good morning," she said, coldly, and walked off. The assistant watched her as she descended the path to the cove, but she did not once look back. Brown threw himself into a chair. He had never hated anyone as thoroughly as he hated himself at the moment.

"What a cheerful liar she must think I am," he reflected. "She caught me in that fool yarn about meeting her brother here last summer; and now, after deliberately promising to teach her that stroke, I don't go near her. What a miserable liar she must think I am! And I guess I am. By George, I can't be such a cad. I've got to make good somehow. I must give her *one* lesson. I must."

The tide served for bathing about three that afternoon. At ten minutes before that hour the substitute assistant keeper of Eastboro Twin-Lights tiptoed silently to the bedroom of his superior and peeped in. Seth was snoring peacefully.

Brown stealthily withdrew. At three, precisely, he emerged from the boathouse on the wharf, clad in his bathing suit.

Fifteen minutes after three, Seth Atkins, in his stocking feet and with suspicion in his eye, crept along the path to the edge of the bluff. Crouching behind a convenient sand dune he raised his head and peered over it.

Below him was the cove, its pleasant waters a smooth, deep blue, streaked and bordered with pale green. But the water itself did not interest Seth. In that water was his helper, John Brown, of nowhere in particular, John Brown, the hater of females, busily engaged in teaching a young woman to swim.

Atkins watched this animated picture for some minutes. Then, carefully crawling back up to the path until he was well out of possible sight from the cove, he rose to his feet, raised both hands, and shook their clenched fists above his head.

"The liar!" grated Mr. Atkins, between his teeth. "The traitor! The young blackguard! After tellin' me that he . . . And after my doin' everything for him that . . . Oh, by Judas, wait! only wait till he comes back! *I'll*

l'arn him! *I'll* show him! Oh, by jiminy crimps!"

He strode toward the doorway of the kitchen. There he stopped short. A woman was seated in the kitchen rocker; a stout woman, with her back toward him. The room, in contrast to the bright sunshine without, was shadowy, and Seth, for an instant, could see her but indistinctly. However, he knew who she must be—the housekeeper at the bungalow—"Basket" or "Biscuit" his helper had said was her name, as near as he could remember it. The lightkeeper ground his teeth. Another female! Well, he would teach this one a few things!

He stepped across the threshold.

"Ma'am," he began, sharply, "perhaps you'll tell me what you——"

He stopped. The stout woman had, at the sound of his step, risen from the chair, and turned to face him. And now she was staring at him, her face almost as white as the stone-china cups and saucers on the table.

"Why . . . why . . . *Seth!*" she gasped.

The lightkeeper staggered back until his shoulders struck the doorpost.

"Good Lord!" he cried; "good . . . *Lord!* Why—why—*Emeline!*"

For over a minute the pair stared at each other, white and speechless. Then Mrs. Bascom hurried to the door, darted out, and fled along the path around the cove to the bungalow. Atkins did not follow her; he did not even look in the direction she had taken. Instead, he collapsed in the rocking-chair and put both hands to his head.

CHAPTER X

THE BUNGALOW WOMAN

WHEN, an hour later, the swimming teacher, his guilty conscience pricking him, and the knowledge of having been false to his superior strong within him, came sneaking into the kitchen, he was startled and horrified to find the lightkeeper awake and dressed. Mentally he braced himself for the battery of embarrassing questions which, he felt sure, he should have to answer. It might be that he must face something more serious than questions. Quite possible Seth, finding him absent, had investigated—and seen. Well, if he had, then he had, that was all. The murder would be out, and Eastboro Twin-Lights would shortly be shy a substitute assistant keeper.

But there were no embarrassing questions. Atkins scarcely noticed him. Seated in the rocker, he looked up as the young man entered, and imme-

diately looked down again. He seemed to be in a sort of waking dream and only dimly conscious of happenings about him.

"Hello!" hailed the assistant, with an assumption of casual cheerfulness.

"Hey? Oh! how be you?" was Mr. Atkins's reply.

"I've been for my dip," explained Brown. "The water was fine to-day."

"Want to know!"

"You're up early, aren't you?"

"Hey? Yes, I guess likely I be."

"What's wrong? Not sick, are you?"

"No. Course I ain't sick. Say!" Seth seemed to take a sudden interest in the conversation, "you come straight up from the cove, have you?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You ain't been hangin' around outside here, have you?"

"Hanging around outside? What do you mean?"

"Nothin'. Why do you stand there starin' at me as if I was some sort of dime show curiosity? Anything queer about me?"

"No. I didn't know I was staring." The young man was bewildered by this strange behav-

ior. He was prepared for suspicion concerning his own actions; but Seth seemed rather to be defending himself from suspicion on the part of his helper.

"Humph!" The lightkeeper looked keenly at him for a moment. Then he said:

"Well, ain't there nothin' to do but stand around? Gettin' pretty nigh to supper time, ain't it? Put the kettle on and set the table."

It was not supper time, but Brown obeyed orders. Seth went to cooking. He spoke perhaps three words during the culinary operations, and a half dozen more during the meal, of which he ate scarcely a mouthful. After it was over, he put on his cap and went out, not to his usual lounging spot, the bench, but to walk a full half mile along the edge of the bluff and there sit in the seclusion of a clump of bayberry bushes and gaze stonily at nothing in particular. Here he remained until the deepening dusk reminded him that it was time the lights were burning. Returning, he lit the lanterns and sat down in the room at the top of the left-hand tower to think, and think, and think.

The shadows deepened; the last flush of twilight faded from the western sky; the stars came out; night and the black silence of night shrouded East-

boro Twin-Lights. The clock in the tower room ticked on to nine and then to ten. Still Seth sat, a huddled, dazed figure in the camp chair, by the great lantern. At last he rose and went out on the iron balcony. He looked down at the buildings below him; they were black shapes without a glimmer. Brown had evidently gone to bed. In the little stable Joshua thumped the side of his stall once or twice—dreaming, perhaps, that he was again pursued by the fly-papered Job—and subsided. Atkins turned his gaze across the inlet. In the rear window of the bungalow a dim light still burned. As he watched, it was extinguished. He groaned aloud, and, with his arms on the railing, thought and thought.

Suddenly he heard sounds, faint, but perceptible, above the low grumble of the surf. They were repeated, the sounds of breaking sticks, as if some one was moving through the briers and bushes beyond the stable. Some one was moving there, coming along the path from the upper end of the cove. Around the corner of the stable a bulky figure appeared. It came on until it stood beneath the balcony.

"Seth," called a low voice; "Seth, are you there?"

For a moment the agitated lightkeeper could not trust his voice to answer.

"Seth," repeated the voice; "Seth."

The figure was moving off in the direction of the other tower. Then Seth answered.

"Here—here I be," he stammered, in a hoarse whisper. "Who is it?"

He knew who it was, perfectly well; the question was quite superfluous.

"It's me," said the voice. "Let me in, I've got to talk to you."

Slowly, scarcely certain that this was not a part of some dreadful nightmare, Seth descended the iron ladder to the foot of the tower, dragged his faltering feet to the door, and slowly swung it open. The bulky figure entered instantly.

"Shut the door," said Mrs. Bascom.

"Hey? What?" stammered Seth.

"I say, shut that door. Hurry up! Land sakes, *hurry!* Do you suppose I want anybody to know I'm here?"

The lightkeeper closed the door. The clang reverberated through the tower like distant thunder. The visitor started nervously.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed; "what a racket! What made you slam it?"

"Didn't," grumbled Seth. "Any kind of a noise sounds up in here."

"I should think as much. It's enough to wake the dead."

"Ain't nobody *but* the dead to wake in this place."

"Yes, there is; there's that young man of yours, that Brown one. He ain't dead, is he?"

"Humph! he's asleep, and that's next door to dead—with him."

"Well, I'm glad of it. My nerves are pretty steady as a general thing, but I declare I'm all of a twitter to-night—and no wonder. It's darker than a pocket in here. Can't we have a light?"

Atkins stumbled across the stone floor and took the lantern from the hook by the stairs. He struck a match, and it went out; he tried another, with the same result. Mrs. Bascom fidgeted.

"Mercy on us!" she cried; "what *does* ail the thing?"

Seth's trembling fingers could scarcely hold the third match. He raked it across the whitewashed wall and broke the head short off.

"Thunder to mighty!" he snarled, under his breath.

"But what *does*——"

"What does? What do you s'pose? You ain't the only one that's got nerves, are you?"

The next trial was successful, and the lantern was lighted. With it in his hand, he turned and faced his caller. They looked at each other. Mrs. Bascom drew a long breath.

"It is you," she said. "I couldn't scarcely believe it. It is really you."

Seth's answer was almost a groan. "It's you," he said. "You—down here."

This ended the conversation for another minute. Then the lady seemed to awake to the realities of the situation.

"Yes," she said, "it's me—and it's you. We're here, both of us. Though why on earth *you* should be, I don't know."

"Me? Me? Why, I belong here. But you—what in time sent you here? Unless," with returning suspicion, "you came because I——"

He paused, warned by the expression on his caller's face.

"What was that?" she demanded.

"Nothin'."

"Nothin', I guess. If you was flatterin' yourself with the idea that I came here to chase after you, you never was more mistaken in your life, or

ever will be. You set down. You and I have got to talk. Set right down."

The lightkeeper hesitated. Then he obeyed orders by seating himself on an oil barrel lying on its side near the wall. The lantern he placed on the floor at his feet. Mrs. Bascom perched on one of the lower steps of the iron stairs.

"Now," she said, "we've got to talk. Seth Bascom——"

Seth started violently.

"What is it?" asked the lady. "Why did you jump like that? Nobody comin', is there?"

"No. No . . . But I couldn't help jumpin' when you called me that name."

"That name? It's your name, isn't it? Oh," she smiled slightly; "I remember now. You've taken the name of Atkins since we saw each other last."

"I didn't take it; it belonged to me. You know my middle name. I just dropped the Bascom, that's all."

"I see. Just as you dropped—some other responsibilities. Why didn't you drop the whole christenin' and start fresh? Why did you hang on to 'Seth'?"

The lightkeeper looked guilty. Mrs. Bascom's

smile broadened. "I know," she went on. "You didn't really like to drop it all. It was too much of a thing to do on your hook, and there wasn't anybody to tell you to do it, and so you couldn't quite be spunky enough to——"

He interrupted her. "That wa'n't the reason," he said shortly.

"What was the reason?"

"You want to know, do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, the 'Bascom' part wa'n't mine no more —not all mine. I'd given it to you."

"O—oh! oh, I see. And you ran away from your name as you ran away from your wife. I see. And . . . why, of course! you came down here to run away from all the women. Miss Ruth said this mornin' she was told—I don't know who by —that the lightkeeper was a woman-hater. Are you the woman-hater, Seth?"

Mr. Atkins looked at the floor. "Yes, I be," he answered, sullenly. "Do you wonder?"

"I don't wonder at your runnin' away; that I should have expected. But there," more briskly, "this ain't gettin' us anywhere. You're here—and I'm here. Now what's your idea of the best thing to be done, under the circumstances?"

Seth shifted his feet. "One of us better go somewheres else, if you ask me," he declared.

"Run away again, you mean? Well, I sha'n't run away. I'm Miss Ruth's housekeeper for the summer. I answered her advertisement in the Boston paper and we agreed as to wages and so on. I like her and she likes me. Course if I'd known my husband was in the neighborhood, I shouldn't have come here; but I didn't know it. Now I'm here and I'll stay my time out. What are you goin' to do?"

"I'm goin' to send in my resignation as keeper of these lights. That's what I'm goin' to do, and I'll do it to-morrow."

"Run away again?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Why? *Why?* Emeline Bascom, do you ask me that?"

"I do, yes. See here, Seth, we ain't children, nor sentimental young folks. We're sensible, or we'd ought to be. Land knows we're old enough. I shall stay here and you ought to. Nobody knows I was your wife or that you was my husband, and nobody needs to know it. We ain't even got the

same names. We're strangers, far's folks know, and we can stay strangers."

"But—but to see each other every day and——"

"Why not? We've seen each other often enough so that the sight won't be so wonderful. And we'll keep our bein' married a secret. I sha'n't boast of it, for one."

"But—but to *see* each other——"

"Well, we needn't see each other much. Why, we needn't see each other any, unless I have to run over to borrer somethin', same as neighbors have to every once in a while. I can guess what's troublin' you; it's young Brown. You've told him you're a woman-hater, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have."

"Humph! Is he one, too?"

The lightkeeper's mouth was twisted with a violent emotion. He remembered his view of that afternoon's swimming lesson.

"He said he was," he snarled. "He pretends he is."

Mrs. Bascom smiled. "I want to know," she said. "Umph! I thought . . . However, it's no matter. Perhaps he is. Anyhow he can pretend to be and you can pretend to believe him. That'll

be the easiest way, I guess. Of course," she added, "I ain't tellin' you what to do with any idea that you'll do it because I say so. The time for that is all past and gone. But it seems to me that, for once in my life, I'd be man enough to stick it out. I wouldn't run away again."

Seth did not answer. He scowled and stared at the circle of lantern light on the stone floor. Mrs. Bascom rose from her seat on the stairs.

"Well," she observed, "I must be gettin' back to the house if I want to get any sleep to-night. I doubt if I get much, for a body don't get over a shock, such as I've had, in a minute. But I'm goin' to get over it and I'm goin' to stay right here and do my work; I'm goin' to go through with what seems to be my duty, no matter how hard it is. I've done it afore, and I'll do it again. I've promised, and I keep my promises. Good night."

She started toward the door. Her husband sprang from the oil barrel.

"Hold on," he cried; "you wait a minute. I've got somethin' to say."

She shook her head. "I can't wait," she said; "I've got to go."

"No, you ain't, neither. You can stay a spell longer, if you want to."

"Perhaps, but I don't want to."

"Why not? What are you afraid of?"

"Afraid! I don't know as I'm afraid of anything—that is," with a contemptuous sniff, "nothin' I see around here."

"Then what are *you* runnin' away for?"

This was putting the matter in a new light. Mrs. Bascom regarded her husband with wrathful amazement, which slowly changed to an amused smile.

"Oh," she said, "if you think I'm runnin' away, why——"

"I don't see what else 'tis. If I ain't scart to have you here, I don't see why you should be scart to stay. Set down on them stairs again; I want to talk to you."

The lady hesitated an instant and then returned to her former seat. Seth went back to his barrel.

"Emeline," he said. "I'll stay here on my job."

She looked surprised, but she nodded.

"I'm glad to hear it," she said. "I'm glad you've got that much spunk."

"Yup; well, I have. I came down here to get clear of everybody, women most of all. Now the one woman that—that——"

"That you 'specially wanted to get clear of——"

"No! No! that ain't the truth, and you know it. She set out to get clear of me—and I let her have her way, same as I done in everything else."

"She didn't set out to get clear of you."

"She did."

"No, she didn't."

"I say she did."

Mrs. Bascom rose once more. "Seth Bascom," she declared, "if all you wanted me to stay here for is to be one of a pair of katydids, hollerin' at each other, I'm goin'. I'm no bug; I'm a woman."

"Emeline, you set down. You've hove out a whole lot of hints about my not bein' a man because I run away from your house. Do you think I'd have been more of a man if I'd stayed in it? Stayed there and been a yaller dog to be kicked out of one corner and into another by you and—and that brother-in-law of yours. That's all I was—a dog."

"Humph! if a dog's the right breed—and big enough—it's his own fault if he's kicked twice."

"Not if he cares more for his master than he does for himself—'taint."

"Why, yes, it is. He can make his master re-

spect him by provin' he ain't the kind of dog to kick. And maybe one of his masters—his real master, for he hadn't ought to have but one—might be needin' the right kind of watchdog around the house. Might be in trouble her—himself, I mean; and be hopin' and prayin' for the dog to protect her—him, I should say. And then the——"

"Emeline, what are you talkin' about?"

"Oh, nothin', nothin'. Seth, what's the use of us two settin' here at twelve o'clock at night and quarrelin' over what's past and settled? I sha'n't do it, for one. *I* don't want to quarrel with you."

Seth sighed. "And I don't want to quarrel with you, Emeline," he agreed. "As you say, there's no sense in it. Dear! dear! this, when you come to think of it, is the queerest thing altogether that ever was in the world, I guess. Us two had all creation to roam 'round in, and we landed at Eastboro Twin-Lights. It seems almost as if Providence done it, for some purpose or other."

"Yes; or the other critter, for *his* purposes. How did you ever come to be keeper of a light, Seth?"

"Why—why—I don't know. I used to be in the service, 'fore I went to sea much. You re-

member I told you I did. And I sort of drifted down here. I didn't care much what became of me, and I wanted a lonesome hole to hide in, and this filled the bill. I've been here ever since I left —left—where I used to be. But, Emeline, how did *you* come here? You answered an advertisement, you told me; but why?"

"'Cause I wanted to do somethin' to earn my livin'. I was alone, and I rented my house and boarded. But boardin' ain't much comfort, 'specially when you board where everybody knows you, and knows your story. So I——"

"Wait a minute. You was alone, you say? Where was—was *he?*"

"He?"

"Yes. You know who I mean."

He would not speak the hated name. His wife spoke it for him.

"Bennie?" she asked. "Oh, he ain't been with me for 'most two year now. He—he went away. He's in New York now. And I was alone and I saw Miss Graham's advertisement for a housekeeper and answered it. I needed the money and——"

"Hold on! You needed the money? Why, you had money."

"Abner left me a little, but it didn't last forever. And——"

"You had more'n a little. I wrote to bank folks there and turned over my account to you. And I sent 'em a power of attorney turnin' over some stocks—you know what they was—to you, too. I done that soon's I got to Boston. Didn't they tell you?"

"Yes, they told me."

"Well, then, that ought to have helped along."

"You don't s'pose I took it, do you?"

"Why—why not?"

"Why not! Do you s'pose I'd use the money that belonged to the husband that run off and left me? I ain't that kind of a woman. The money and stocks are at the bank yet, I s'pose; anyhow they're there for all of me."

The lightkeeper's mouth opened and stayed open for seconds before he could use it as a talking machine. He could scarcely believe what he had heard.

"But—but I wanted you to have it," he gasped. "I left it for you."

"Well, I didn't take it; 'tain't likely!" with fiery indignation. "Did you think I could be bought off like a—a mean—oh, I don't know what?"

"But—but I left it at the bank—for you. What—what'll I do with it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. You might give it to Sarah Ann Christy; I wouldn't wonder if she was less particular than I be."

Seth's guns were spiked, for the moment. He felt the blood rush to face, and his fists, as he brandished them in the air, trembled.

"I—I—you—you—" he stammered. "I—I—you think I——"

He knew that his companion would regard his agitation as an evidence of conscious guilt, and this knowledge did not help to calm him. He strode up and down the floor.

"Look out," said Mrs. Bascom, coldly, "you'll kick over the lantern."

Her husband stopped in his stride. "Darn the lantern!" he shouted.

"S-sh-sh! you'll wake up the Brown man."

This warning was more effective. But Seth was still furious.

"Emeline Bascom," he snarled, shaking his forefinger in her face, "you've said over and over that I wa'n't a man. You have, haven't you?"

She was looking at his shirt cuff, then but a few inches from her nose.

"Who sewed on that button?" she asked.

This was so unexpected that his wrath was, for the instant, displaced by astonishment.

"What?" he asked. "What button?"

"That one on your shirt sleeve. Who sewed it on?"

"Why, I did, of course. What a crazy question that is!"

She smiled. "I guessed you did," she said. "Nobody but a man would sew a white button on a white shirt—or one that was white once—with black thread."

He looked at the button and then at her. His anger returned.

"You said I wa'n't a man, didn't you?" he demanded.

"Yes, I did. But I'll have to take part of it back. You're half a man anyhow; that sewin' proves it."

"Huh! I want to know. Well, maybe I ain't a man; maybe I'm only half a one. But I ain't a fool! I ain't a fool!"

She sighed wearily. "Well, all right," she admitted. "I sha'n't argue it."

"You needn't. I ain't—or anyhow I ain't an *everlastin'* fool. And nobody but the everlastin'-

est of all fools would chase Sarah Ann Christy. *I* didn't. That whole business was just one of your —your Bennie D.'s lies. You know that, too."

"I know some one lied; I heard 'em. They denied seein' Sarah Ann, and I saw 'em with her—with my own eyes I saw 'em. . . . But there, there," she added; "this is enough of such talk. I'm goin' now."

"I didn't lie; I forgot."

"All right, then, you forgot. I ain't jealous, Seth. I wa'n't even jealous then. Even then I give you a chance, and you didn't take it—you 'forgot' instead. I'm goin' back to the bungalow, but afore I go let's understand this: you're to stay here at the lights, and I stay where I am as housekeeper. We don't see each other any oftener than we have to, and then only when nobody else is around. We won't let my Miss Graham nor your Brown nor anybody know we've ever met afore—or are meetin' now. Is that it?"

Seth hesitated. "Yes," he said, slowly, "I guess that's it. But," he added, anxiously, "I—I wish you'd be 'specially careful not to let that young feller who's workin' for me know. Him and me had a—a sort of agreement and—and I—I——"

"He sha'n't know. Good-by."

She fumbled with the latch of the heavy door. He stepped forward and opened it for her. The night was very dark; a heavy fog, almost a rain, had drifted in while they were together. She didn't seem to notice or mind the fog or blackness, but went out and disappeared beyond the faint radiance which the lantern cast through the open door. She blundered on and turned the corner of the house; then she heard steps behind her.

"Who is it?" she whispered, in some alarm.

"Me," whispered the lightkeeper, gruffly. "I'll go with you a ways."

"No, of course you won't. I'm goin' alone."

"It's too dark for you to go alone. You'll lose the way."

"I'm goin' alone, I tell you! Go back. I don't want you."

"I know you don't; but I'm goin'. You'll fetch up in the cove or somewheres if you try to navigate this path on your own hook."

"I sha'n't. I'm used to findin' my own way, and I'm goin' alone—as I've had to do for a good while. Go back."

She stopped short. Seth stopped, also.

"Go back," she insisted, adding scornfully: "I

don't care for your help at all. I'm partic'lar about my company."

"I ain't," sullenly. "Anyhow, I'm goin' to pilot you around the end of that cove. You sha'n't say I let you get into trouble when I might have kept you out of it."

"Say? Who would I say it to? Think I'm so proud of this night's cruise that I'll brag of it? *Will* you go back?"

"No."

They descended the hill, Mrs. Bascom in advance. She could not see the path, but plunged angrily on through the dripping grass and bushes.

"Emeline—Emeline," whispered Seth. She paid no attention to him. They reached the foot of the slope and suddenly the lady realized that her shoes, already wet, were now ankle deep in water. And there seemed to be water amid the long grass all about her.

"Why? What in the world?" she exclaimed involuntarily. "What is it?"

"The salt marsh at the end of the cove," answered the lightkeeper. "I told you you'd fetch up in it if you tried to go alone. Been tryin' to tell you you was off the track, but you wouldn't listen to me."

And she would not listen to him now. Turning, she splashed past him.

"Hold on," he whispered, seizing her arm. "That ain't the way."

She shook herself from his grasp.

"*Will* you let me be, and mind your own business?" she hissed.

"No, I won't. I've set out to get you home, and I'll do it if I have to carry you."

"Carry me? You? You *dare!*"

His answer was to pick her up in his arms. She was no light weight, and she fought and wriggled fiercely, but Seth was big and strong and he held her tight. She did not scream; she was too anxious not to wake either the substitute assistant or Miss Graham, but she made her bearer all the trouble she could. They splashed on for some distance; then Seth set her on her feet, and beneath them was dry ground.

"There!" he grumbled, breathlessly. "Now I cal'late you can't miss the rest of it. There's the bungalow right in front of you."

"You—you—" she gasped, chokingly.

"Ugh!" grunted her husband, and stalked off into the dark.

CHAPTER XI

BEHIND THE SAND DUNE

"A FOG last night, wasn't there?" inquired Brown. Breakfast was over, and Seth was preparing for his day's sleep.

"Yes, some consider'ble," was the gruff answer; then, more sharply, "How'd you know? 'Twas all gone this mornin'."

"Oh, I guessed, that's all."

"Humph! Guessed, hey? You wa'n't up in the night, was you?"

"No. Slept like a top all through."

"Humph! . . . Well, that's good; sleep's a good thing. Cal'late I'll turn in and get a little myself."

He moved toward the living room. At the door he paused and asked another question.

"How'd you—er—guess there was fog last night?" he inquired.

"Oh, that was easy; everything—grass and

bushes—were so wet this morning. Those boots of yours, for example," pointing to the pair the lightkeeper had just taken off, "they look as if you had worn them wading."

His back was toward his superior as he spoke, therefore he did not see the start which the latter gave at this innocent observation, nor the horrified glare at the soaked boots. But he could not help noticing the change in Seth's voice.

"Wa—wadin'?" repeated Atkins faintly. "What's that you say?"

"I said the boots were as wet as if you had been wading. Why?"

"Wha—what made you say a fool thing like that? How could I go wadin' on top of a lighthouse?"

"I don't know. . . . There, there!" impatiently, "don't ask any more questions. I didn't say you had been wading, and I didn't suppose you really had. I was only joking. What *is* the matter with you?"

"Nothin' . . . nothin'. So you was just jokin', hey? Ha, ha! Yes, yes, wadin' up in a lighthouse would be a pretty good joke. I—I didn't see it at first, you know. Ha, ha! I thought you must be off your head. Thought you'd been swim-

min' too much or somethin'. So long, I'm goin' to bed."

But now it was the helper's turn to start and stammer.

"Wait!" he cried. "What—what did you say about my—er—swimming, was it?"

"Oh, nothin', nothin'. I was just jokin', same as you was about the wadin'. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!"

Both laughed with great heartiness. The door shut between them, and each stared doubtfully at his side of it for several moments before turning away.

That forenoon was a dismal one for John Brown. His troublesome conscience, stirred by Seth's reference to swimming, was again in full working order. He tried to stifle its reproaches, tried to give his entire attention to his labors about the lights and in the kitchen, but the consciousness of guilt was too strong. He felt mean and traitorous, a Benedict Arnold on a small scale. He had certainly treated Atkins shabbily; Atkins, the man who trusted him and believed in him, whom he had loftily reproved for "spying" and then betrayed. Yet, in a way his treason, so far, had been unavoidable. He had promised—had even *offered*

to teach the Graham girl the "side stroke." He had not meant to make such an offer or promise, but Fate had tricked him into it, and he could not, as a gentleman, back out altogether. He had been compelled to give her one lesson. But he need not give her another. He need not meet her again. He would not. He would keep the agreement with Seth and forget the tenants of the bungalow altogether. Good old Atkins! Good old Seth, the woman-hater! How true he was to his creed, the creed which he, Brown, had so lately professed. It was a good creed, too. Women were at the bottom of all the world's troubles. They deserved to be hated. He would never, never——

"Well, by George!" he exclaimed aloud.

He was looking once more at the lightkeeper's big leather boots. One of them was lying on its side, and the upturned sole and heel were thickly coated with blue clay. He crossed the room, picked up the boots and examined them. Each was smeared with the clay. He put them down again, shook his head, wandered over to the rocking-chair and sat down.

Seth had cleaned and greased those boots before he went to bed the day before; Brown had seen him doing it. He had put them on after

supper, just before going on watch; the substitute assistant had seen him do that, also. Therefore, the clay must have been acquired sometime during the evening or night just past. And certainly there was no clay at the "top of the lighthouse," or anywhere in the neighborhood except at one spot—the salt marsh at the inner end of the cove. Seth must have visited that marsh in the nighttime. But why? And, if he had done so, why did he not mention the fact? And, now that the helper thought of it, why had he been so agitated at the casual remark concerning wading? What was he up to? Now that the *Daisy M.* and story of the wife were no longer secrets, what had Seth Atkins to conceal?

Brown thought and guessed and surmised, but guesses and surmises were fruitless. He finished his dishwashing and began another of the loathed housekeeping tasks, that of rummaging the pantry and seeing what eatables were available for his luncheon and the evening meal.

He spread the various odds and ends on the kitchen table, preparatory to taking account of stock. A part of a slab of bacon, a salt codfish, some cold clam fritters, a few molasses cookies, and half a loaf of bread. He had gotten thus far

in the inventory when a shadow darkened the doorway. He turned and saw Mrs. Bascom, the bungalow housekeeper.

"Good mornin'," said Mrs. Bascom.

Brown answered coldly. Why on earth was it always his luck to be present when these female nuisances made their appearance? And why couldn't they let him alone, just as he had determined to let them alone—in the future? Of course he was glad that the caller was not Miss Graham, but this one was bad enough.

"Morning," he grunted, and took another dish, this one containing a section of dry and ancient cake, Seth's manufacture, from the pantry.

"What you doin'? Gettin' breakfast this time of day?" asked the housekeeper, entering the kitchen. She had a small bowl in her hand.

"No," replied Brown.

"Dinner, then? Pretty early for that, ain't it?"

"I am not getting either breakfast or dinner—or supper, madam," replied the helper, with emphasis. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Well, I don't know but there is. I come over hopin' you might. How's the stings?"

"The what?"

"The wasp bites."

"They're all right, thank you."

"You're welcome, I'm sure. Did you put the cold mud on 'em, same as I told you to?"

"No. . . . What was it you wanted?"

Mrs. Bascom looked about for a seat. The rocker was at the opposite side of the room, and the other chair contained a garment belonging to Mr. Atkins, one which that gentleman, with characteristic disregard of the conventionalities, had discarded before leaving the kitchen and had forgotten to take with him. The lady picked up the garment, looked at it, and sat down in the chair.

"Your boss is to bed, I s'pose likely?" she asked.

"You mean Mr. Atkins? I suppose likely he is."

"Um. I judged he was by"—with a glance at the garment which she still held—"the looks of things. What in the world *are* you doin'—cleanin' house?"

The young man sighed wearily. "Yes," he said with forced resignation, "something of that sort."

"Seein' what there was to eat, I guess."

"You guess right. You said you had an errand, I think."

"Did I? Well, I come to see if I couldn't . . . What's that stuff? Cake?"

She rose, picked up a slice of the dry cake, broke it between her fingers, smelled of it, and replaced it on the plate.

"'Tis cake, ain't it?" she observed; "or it was, sometime or other. Who made it? You?"

"No."

"Oh, your boss, Mr.—er—Atkins, hey?"

"Yes. Considering that there are only two of us here, and I didn't make it, it would seem pretty certain that he must have."

"Yes, I guess that's right; unless 'twas some that washed ashore from Noah's Ark, and it's too dry for that. What on earth are these?" picking up one of the molasses cookies; "stove lids?"

Brown grinned, in spite of his annoyance.

"Those are supposed to be cookies," he admitted.

"Are they? Yes, yes. Mr. Atkins responsible for them?"

"No—o. I'm afraid those are one of my experiments, under Mr. Atkins's directions and orders. I'm rather proud of those cookies, myself."

"You'd ought to be. There, there!" with a smile, "I guess you think I'm pretty free with my criticism and remarks, don't you? You must excuse me. Housekeepin'—'specially the cookin' part—is my hobby, as you might say, and I was interested to see how a couple of men got along with the job. I mustn't set around and keep you from your work. You might want to make some more cookies, or somethin'."

The substitute assistant laughed aloud. "I wasn't thinking of it," he said; "but I shall be glad to make the attempt if it would afford you amusement."

Mrs. Bascom laughed, too. "I guess you're better natured than I thought you was," she observed. "It might amuse me some, I will admit, but I ain't got the time. I came to borrow some butter, if you've got any to spare. Down here we're as far from supplies as the feller that run the Ark I was mentionin', old Noah himself."

Brown took the bowl from her hands and went to the pantry to get the butter. When he turned again she was standing by the door, one hand hidden beneath her apron. She took the bowl with the other.

"Much obliged," she said. "I'll fetch this

back soon's the grocery cart comes. Miss Graham made arrangements to have him drive across every Saturday. Or, rather, I arranged for it myself. Her head's too full of paintin' and scenery to think of much else. I tell her you can't eat an ile paintin'—unless you're born a goat. Good-by."

She went away. Brown chuckled and went on with his account of stock.

Seth "turned out" rather early that day. At half past one he appeared in the kitchen, partially dressed.

"Where in time is my shirt?" he demanded impatiently.

"Your what?"

"My shirt. I thought I took it off out here. Could have sworn I did. Guess likely I didn't, though. Must be gettin' absent-minded."

He was on his way back to the bedroom when his helper called.

"You did take it off out here," he cried. "It was on that chair there. I remember seeing it. Probably it has fallen on the floor somewhere."

Atkins returned, grumbling that the kitchen floor was a "healthy place to heave a shirt."

"Where is it?" he asked after a hurried

search. "I can't find it nowheres. Didn't put it in the fire, did ye?"

"Of course I didn't. I saw it. . . . Why, I remember that woman's picking it up when she sat down."

"Woman? What woman?"

"That Baskin—Buskin—whatever her name is. The housekeeper at the bungalow."

"Was she—*here?*" Seth's question was almost a shout. His helper stared at him.

"Yes," he answered; "she was. She came to borrow some butter."

"To—to borrow—butter?"

"Why, yes. You didn't think I invited her in for a morning call, did you? Don't act as if you had been struck by lightning. It's not so very serious. We've got to expect some trouble of that kind. I got rid of her as soon as I could."

"You—you did?"

"Yes, I did. You should thank me. I am on duty during the day, and I suppose most of that sort of thing will fall on me. You're lucky. Our neighbors aren't likely to make many calls after dark. . . . What's the matter now? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Seth walked to the door and leaned against the

post. Brown repeated his question. "What *is* the matter?" he asked. "You act just as you did when I first happened into this forsak—this place. If you've got any more hideous secrets up your sleeve I'm going to quit."

"Secrets!" Atkins laughed, or tried to. "I ain't got any secrets," he declared, "any more than you have."

The latter half of this speech shut off further questioning. Brown turned hastily away, and the lightkeeper went into his bedroom and finished dressing.

"Find your shirt?" asked the young man an hour or so later.

"Hey? Yes, yes; I found it."

"In your room? That's odd. I could have sworn I saw it out here. Is that it you're wearing?"

"Hey? No. That was—was sort of s'iled, so I put on my other one. I—I cal'late I'll go over and work on the *Daisy M.* a spell, unless you need me."

"I don't need you. Go ahead."

The time dragged for John Brown after his superior's departure. There was work enough to be done, but he did not feel like doing it. He wandered around the house and lights, gloomy,

restless and despondent. Occasionally he glanced at the clock.

It was a beautiful afternoon, just the afternoon for a swim, and he was debarred from swimming, not only that day, but for all the summer days to come. No matter what Seth's new secret might be, it was surely not connected with the female sex, and Brown would be true to the solemn compact between them. He could not bathe in the cove because Miss Graham would be there.

At four o'clock he stood in the shadow of the light tower looking across the cove. As he looked he saw Miss Graham, in bathing attire, emerge from the bungalow and descend the bluff. She did not see him and, to make sure that she might not, he dodged back out of sight. Then he saw something else.

Out on the dunes back of the barn he caught a glimpse of a figure darting to cover behind a clump of bushes. The figure was a familiar one, but what was it doing there? He watched the bushes, but they did not move. Then he entered the house, went upstairs, and cautiously peered from the back attic window.

The bushes remained motionless for some minutes. Then they stirred ever so slightly, and above

them appeared the head of Seth Atkins. Seth seemed to be watching the cove and the lights. For another minute he peered over the bushes, first at the bathing waters below and then at his own dwelling. Brown ground his teeth. The light-keeper was "spying" again, was watching to see if he violated his contract.

But no, that could not be, for now Seth, apparently sure that the coast was clear, emerged from his hiding place and ran in a stooping posture until he reached another clump further off and nearer the end of the cove. He remained there an instant and then ran, still crouching, until he disappeared behind a high dune at the rear of the bungalow. And there he stayed; at least Brown did not see him come out.

What he did see, however, was just as astonishing. The landward door of the bungalow opened, and Mrs. Bascom, the housekeeper, stepped out into the yard. She seemed to be listening and looking. Apparently she must have heard something, for she moved away for some little distance and stood still. Then, above the edge of the dune, showed Seth's head and arm. He beckoned to her. She walked briskly across the intervening space, turned the ragged, grass-grown corner of

the knoll and disappeared, also. Brown, scarcely believing his eyes, waited and watched, but he saw no more. Neither Seth nor the housekeeper came out from behind that dune.

But the substitute assistant had seen enough—quite enough. Seth Atkins, Seth, the woman-hater, the man who had threatened him with all sorts of penalties if he ever so much as looked at a female, was meeting one of the sex himself, meeting her on the sly. What it meant Brown could not imagine. Probably it explained the clay smears on the boots and Seth's discomfiture of the morning; but that was immaterial. The fact, the one essential fact, was this: the compact was broken. Seth had broken it. Brown was relieved of all responsibility. If he wished to swim in that cove, no matter who might be there, he was perfectly free to do it. And he would do it, by George! He had been betrayed, scandalously, meanly betrayed, and it would serve the betrayer right if he paid him in his own coin. He darted down the attic stairs, ran down the path to the boathouse, hurriedly changed his clothes for his bathing suit, ran along the shore of the creek and plunged in.

Miss Graham waved a hand to him as he shook the water from his eyes.

Over behind the sand dune a more or less interesting interview was taking place. Seth, having made sure that his whistles were heard and his signals seen, sank down in the shadow and awaited developments. They were not long in coming. A firm footstep crunched the sand, and Mrs. Bascom appeared.

"Well," she inquired coldly, "what's the matter now?"

Mr. Atkins waved an agitated hand.

"Set down," he begged. "Scooch down out of sight, Emeline, for the land sakes. Don't stand up there where everybody can see you."

The lady refused to "scooch."

"If I ain't ashamed of bein' seen," she observed, "I don't know why you should be. What are you doin' over here anyhow; skippin' 'round in the sand like a hoptoad?"

The lightkeeper repeated his plea.

"Do set down, Emeline, please," he urged. "I thought you and me'd agreed that nobody'd ought to see us together."

Mrs. Bascom gathered her skirts about her and with great deliberation seated herself upon a hummock.

"We did have some such bargain," she re-

plied. "That's why I can't understand your hidin' at my back door and whistlin' and wavin' like a young one. What did you come here for, anyway?"

Seth answered with righteous indignation.

"I come for my shirt," he declared.

"Your shirt?"

"Yes, my other shirt. I left it in the kitchen this mornin', and that—that helper of mine says you was in the chair along with it."

"Humph! Did he have the impudence to say I took it?"

"No—o. No, course he didn't. But it's gone and—and——"

"What would I want of your shirt? Didn't think I was cal'latin' to wear it, did you?"

"No, but——"

"I should hope not. I ain't a Doctor Mary Walker, or whatever her name is."

"But you did take it, just the same. I'm sartin you did. You must have."

The lady's mouth relaxed, and there was a twinkle in her eye.

"All right, Seth," she said. "Suppose I did; what then?"

"I want it back, that's all."

"You can have it. Now what do you s'pose I took it for?"

"I—I—I don't know."

"You don't know? Humph! Did you think I wanted to keep it as a souveneer of last night's doin's?"

Her companion looked rather foolish. He picked up a handful of sand and sifted it through his fingers.

"No—o," he stammered. "I—I know how partic'lar you are—you used to be about such things, and I thought maybe you didn't like the way that button was sewed on."

He glanced up at her with an embarrassed smile, which broadened as he noticed her expression.

"Well," she admitted, "you guessed right. There's some things I can't bear to have in my neighborhood, and your kind of sewin' is one of 'em. Besides, I owed you that much for keepin' me out of the wet last night."

"Oh! I judged by the way you lit into me for luggin' you acrost that marsh that all you owed me was a grudge. I *did* lug you, though, in spite of your kickin', didn't I?"

He nodded with grim triumph. She smiled.

"You did, that's a fact," she said. "I was

pretty mad at the time, but when I come to think it over I felt diff'rent. Anyhow I've sewed on those buttons the way they'd ought to be."

"Much obliged. I guess they'll stay now for a spell. You always could sew on buttons better'n anybody ever I see."

"Humph!" . . . Then, after an interval of silence: "What are you grinnin' to yourself about?"

"Hey? . . . Oh, I was just thinkin' how you mended up that Rogers young one's duds when he fell out of our Bartlett pear tree. He was the raggedest mess ever I come acrost when I picked him up. Yellin' like a wild thing he was, and his clothes half tore off."

"No wonder he yelled. Caught stealin' pears —he expected to be thrashed for that—and he *knew* Melindy Rogers would whip him for tearin' his Sunday suit. Poor little thing! Least I could do was to make his clothes whole. I always pity a child with a stepmother, special when she's Melindy's kind."

"What's become of them Rogerses? Still livin' in the Perry house, are they?"

"No. Old Abel Perry turned 'em out of that when the rent got behind. He's the meanest skin-

flint that ever strained skim milk. He got married again a year ago."

"*No!* Who was the victim? Somebody from the Feeble-Minded Home?"

She gave the name of Mr. Perry's bride, and before they knew it the pair were deep in village gossip. For many minutes they discussed the happenings in the Cape Ann hamlet, and then Seth was recalled to the present by a casual glance at his watch.

"Land!" he exclaimed. "Look at the time! This talk with you has seemed so—so natural and old-timey, that . . . Well, I've got to go."

He was scrambling to his feet. She also attempted to rise, but found it difficult.

"Here," he cried, "give me your hand. I'll help you up."

"I don't want any help. Let me alone. Let me *alone,* I tell you."

His answer was to seize her about the waist and swing her bodily to her feet. She was flushed and embarrassed. Then she laughed shortly and shook her head.

"What are you laughin' at?" he demanded, peering over the knoll to make sure that neither John Brown nor Miss Graham was in sight.

"Oh, not much," she answered. "You kind of surprise me, Seth."

"Why?"

"'Cause you've changed so."

"Changed? How?"

"Oh, changed, that's all. You seem to have more spunk than you used to have."

"Humph! Think so, do you?"

"Yes, I do. I think bein' a lightkeeper must be good for some folks—some kind of folks."

"I want to know!"

"Yes, you better be careful, or you'll be a real man some day."

His answer was an angry stare and a snort. Then he turned on his heel and was striding off.

"Wait!" she called. "Hold on! Don't you want your shirt? Stay here, and I'll go into the house and fetch it."

He waited, sullen and reluctant, until she returned with the article of apparel in one hand and the other concealed beneath her apron.

"Here it is," she said, presenting the shirt to him.

"Thank you," he grumbled, taking it. "Much obliged for sewin' on the button."

"You're welcome. It squares us for your

pilotin' me over the marsh, that's all. 'Twa'n't any favor; I owed it to you."

He was turning the shirt over in his hands.

"Well," he began, then stopped and looked fixedly at the garment.

"I see you've mended that hole in the sleeve," he said. "You didn't owe me that, did you?"

She changed color slightly.

"Oh," she said, with a toss of her head, "that's nothin'. Just for good measure. I never could abide rags on anybody that—that I had to look at whether I wanted to or not."

"'Twas real good of you to mend it, Emeline. Say," he stirred the sand with his boot, "you mentioned that you cal'lated I'd changed some, was more of a man than I used to be. Do you know why?"

"No. Unless," with sarcasm, "it was because I wa'n't around."

"It ain't that. It's because, Emeline, it's because down here I'm nigher bein' where I belong than anywheres else but one place. That place is at sea. When I'm on salt water I'm a man—you don't believe it, but I am. On land I—I don't seem to fit in right. Keepin' a light like this is next door to bein' at sea."

"Seth, I want to ask you a question. Why didn't you go to sea when you ran—when you left me? I s'posed of course you had. Why didn't you?"

He looked at her in surprise.

"Go to sea?" he repeated. "Go to *sea?* How could I? Didn't I promise you I'd never go to sea again?"

"Was *that* the reason?"

"Sartin. What else?"

She did not answer. There was an odd expression on her face. He turned to go.

"Well, good-by," he said.

"Good-by. Er—Seth."

"Yes; what is it?"

"I—I want to tell you," she stammered, "that I appreciated your leavin' that money and stocks at the bank in my name. I couldn't take 'em, of course, but 'twas good of you. I appreciated it."

"That's all right."

"Wait. Here! Maybe you'd like these." She took the hand from beneath her apron and extended it toward him. It held a pan heaped with objects flat, brown, and deliciously fragrant. He looked at the pan and its contents uncomprehendingly.

"What's them?" he demanded.

"They're molasses cookies. I've been bakin', and these are some extry ones I had left over. You can have 'em if you want 'em."

"Why—why, Emeline! this is mighty kind of you."

"Not a mite," sharply. "I baked a good many more'n Miss Ruth and I can dispose of, and that poor helper man of yours ought to be glad to get 'em after the cast-iron pound-weights that you and he have been tryin' to live on. Mercy on us! the thoughts of the cookies he showed me this mornin' have stayed in my head ever since. Made me feel as if I was partly responsible for murder."

"But it's kind of you, just the same."

"Rubbish! I'd do as much for a pig any day. There! you've got your shirt; now you'd better go home."

She forced the pan of cookies into his hand and moved off. The lightkeeper hesitated.

"I—I'll fetch the pan back to-morrer," he called after her in a loud whisper.

CHAPTER XII

THE LETTER AND THE 'PHONE

THE cookies appeared on the table that evening. Brown noticed them at once.

"When did you bake these?" he asked.

Atkins made no reply, so the question was repeated with a variation.

"Did you bake these this afternoon?" inquired the substitute assistant.

"Humph? Hey? Oh, yes, I guess so. Why? Anything the matter with 'em?"

"Matter with them? No. They're the finest things I've tasted since I came here. New receipt, isn't it?"

"Cal'late so."

"I thought it must be. I'll take another."

He took another, and many others thereafter. He and his superior cleared the plate between them.

Brown was prepared for questions concerning

his occupation of the afternoon and was ready with some defiant queries of his own. But no occasion arose for either defiance or cross-examination. Seth never hinted at a suspicion nor mentioned the young lady at the bungalow. Brown therefore remained silent concerning what he had seen from the attic window. He would hold that in reserve, and if Atkins ever did accuse him of bad faith or breach of contract he could retort in kind. His conscience was clear now—he was no more of a traitor than Seth himself—and, this being so, he felt delightfully independent. If trouble came he was ready for it, and in the meantime he should do as he pleased.

But no trouble came. That day, and for many days thereafter, the lightkeeper was sweetness itself. He and his helper had never been more anxious to please each other, and the house at Twin-Lights was—to all appearances—an abode of perfect trust and peace. Every day, when Seth was asleep or out of the way, "working on the *Daisy M.*," the assistant swam to the cove, and every day he met Miss Graham there! During the first week he returned from his dips expecting to be confronted by his superior, and ready with counter accusations of his own. After this he ceased to care.

Seth did not ask a question and was so trustful and unsuspecting that Brown decided his secret was undiscovered. In fact, the lightkeeper was so innocent that the young man felt almost wicked, as if he were deceiving a child. He very nearly forgot the meeting behind the sand dune, having other and much more important things to think of.

July passed, and the first three weeks of August followed suit. The weather, which had been glorious, suddenly gave that part of the coast a surprise party in the form of a three days' storm. It was an offshore gale, but fierce, and the lighthouse buildings rocked in its grasp. Bathing was out of the question, and one of Seth's dories broke its anchor rope and went to pieces in the breakers. Atkins and Brown slept but little during the storm, both being on duty the greater part of the time.

The fourth day broke clear, but the wind had changed to the east and the barometer threatened more bad weather to come. When Seth came in to breakfast he found his helper sound asleep in a kitchen chair, his head on the table. The young man was pretty well worn out. Atkins insisted upon his going to bed for the forenoon.

"Of course I sha'n't," protested Brown. "It's my watch, and you need sleep yourself."

"No, I don't, neither," was the decided answer. "I slept between times up in the tower, off and on. You go and turn in. I've got to drive over to Eastboro by and by, and I want you to be wide awake while I'm away. We ain't done with this spell of weather yet. We'll have rain and an easterly blow by night, see if we don't. You go right straight to bed."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"Yes, you will. I'm your boss and I order you to do it. No back talk, now. Go!"

So Brown went, unwilling but very tired. He was sound asleep in ten minutes.

Seth busied himself about the house, occasionally stepping to the window to look out at the weather. An observer would have noticed that before leaving the window on each of these occasions, his gaze invariably turned toward the bungalow. His thoughts were more constant than his gaze; they never left his little cottage across the cove. In fact, they had scarcely left it for the past month. He washed the breakfast dishes, set the room in order, and was turning once more toward the window, when he heard a footstep approaching the

open door. He knew the step; it was one with which he had been familiar during other and happier days, and now, once more—after all the years and his savage determination to forget and to hate—it had the power to awaken strange emotions in his breast. Yet his first move was to run into the living room and close his helper's chamber door. When he came back to the kitchen, shutting the living-room door carefully behind him, Mrs. Bascom was standing on the sill. She started when she saw him.

"Land sakes!" she exclaimed. "You? I cal'lated, of course, you was abed and asleep."

The lightkeeper waved his hands.

"S-sh-h!" he whispered.

"What shall I s-sh-h about? Your young man's gone somewhere, I s'pose, else you wouldn't be here."

"No, he ain't. He's turned in, tired out."

"Oh, then I guess I'd better go back home. 'Twas him I expected to see, else, of course, I shouldn't have come."

"Oh, I know that," with a sigh. "Where's your boss, Miss Graham?"

"She's gone for a walk along shore. I came over to—to bring back them eggs I borrowed."

"Did you? Where are they?"

The housekeeper seemed embarrassed, and her plump cheeks reddened.

"I—I declare I forgot to bring 'em after all," she stammered.

"I want to know. That's funny. You don't often—that is, you didn't use to forget things hardly ever, Emeline."

"Hum! you remember a lot, don't you."

"I remember more'n you think I do, Emeline."

"That's enough of that, Seth. Remember what I told you last time we saw each other."

"Oh, all right, all right. I ain't rakin' up bygones. I s'pose I deserve all I'm gettin'."

"I s'pose you do. Well, long's I forgot the eggs I guess I might as well be trottin' back. . . . You—you've been all right—you and Mr. Brown, I mean—for the last few days, while the storm was goin' on?"

"Um-h'm," gloomily. "How about you two over to the bungalow? You've kept dry and snug, I judge."

"Yes."

"I didn't know but you might be kind of nervous and scart when 'twas blowin'. All alone so."

"Humph! I've got used to bein' alone. As

for Miss Ruth, I don't think she's scart of anythin'."

"Well, I was sort of nervous about you, if you wa'n't about yourself. 'Twas consider'ble of a gale of wind. I thought one spell I'd blow out of the top of the tower."

"So did I. I could see your shadow movin' 'round up there once in a while. What made you come out on the gallery in the worst of it night afore last?"

"Oh, the birds was smashin' themselves to pieces against the glass same as they always do in a storm, and I . . . But say! 'twas after twelve when I came out. How'd you come to see me? What was your doin' up that time of night?"

Mrs. Bascom's color deepened. She seemed put out by the question.

"So much racket a body couldn't sleep," she explained sharply. "I thought the shingles would lift right off the roof."

"But you wa'n't lookin' at the shingles. You was lookin' at the lighthouses; you jest said so. Emeline, was you lookin' for me? Was you worried about me?"

He bent forward eagerly.

"Hush!" she said, "you'll wake up the other woman-hater."

"I don't care. I don't care if I wake up all creation. Emeline, I believe you was worried about me, same as I was about you. More'n that," he added, conviction and exultation in his tone, "I don't believe 'twas eggs that fetched you here this mornin' at all. I believe you came to find out if we—if I was all right. Didn't you?"

"I didn't come to *see* you, be sure of that," with emphatic scorn.

"I know. But you was goin' to see Brown and find out from him. Answer me. Answer me now, didn't——"

She stepped toward the door. He extended an arm and held her back.

"You answer me," he commanded.

She tried to pass him, but his arm was like an iron bar. She hesitated a moment and then laughed nervously.

"You certainly have took to orderin' folks round since the old days," she said. "Why, yes, then; I did come to find out if you hadn't got cold, or somethin'. You're such a child and I'm such a soft-headed fool I couldn't help it, I cal'late?"

"Emeline, s'pose I had got cold. S'pose you found I was sick—what then?"

"Why—why, then I guess likely I'd have seen

the doctor on my way through Eastboro. I shall be goin' that way to-morrer when I leave here."

"When you leave here? What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say. Miss Graham's goin' to Boston to-morrer, and I'm goin' with her—as far as the city."

"But—but you're comin' back!"

"What should I come back here for? My summer job's over. If you want to know, my principal reason for comin' here this mornin' was to say good-by—to Mr. Brown, of course."

Seth's arm dropped. He leaned heavily against the doorpost.

"You're goin' away!" he exclaimed. "You're goin' away! Where?"

"I don't know. Back home, I s'pose. Though what I'll do when I get there I don't know. I've sold the house, so I don't exactly know where I'll put up. But I guess I'll find a place."

"You've sold your house? The house we used to live in?"

"Yes. The man that's been hirin' it has bought it. I'm glad, for I need the money. So good-by, Seth. 'Tain't likely we'll meet again in this life."

She started toward the door once more, and this

time he was too greatly disturbed and shaken by what she had told him to detain her. At the threshhold she turned and looked at him.

"Good-by, Seth," she said again. "I hope you'll be happy. And," with a half smile, "if I was you I'd stay keepin' lights; it, or somethin' else, has improved you a whole lot. Good-by."

Then he sprang forward. "Emeline," he cried, "Emeline, wait. You mustn't go. I can't let you go this way. I . . . What's that?"

"That" was the sound of horse's feet and the rattle of wheels. The lightkeeper ran to the window.

"It's Henry G.'s grocery cart," he said. "I cal'late he's fetchin' some truck I ordered last week. Do you want him to see you here?"

"I don't care. He don't know but what you and me are the best of friends. Yet, I don't know. Maybe it's just as well he don't see me; then there'll be no excuse for talk. I'll step inside and wait."

She returned to the kitchen, and Seth went out to meet the wagon. Its driver was the boy who had brought the flypaper and "Job."

"Hello," hailed the youngster, pulling in his steed; "how be you, Mr. Atkins? I've got some

of them things you ordered. The rest ain't come from Boston yet. Soon's they do, Henry G.'ll send 'em down. How you feelin' these days? Ain't bought no more dogs, have you?"

Seth curtly replied that he "wa'n't speculatin' in dogs to no great extent any more," and took the packages which the boy handed him. With them was a bundle of newspapers and an accumulation of mail matter.

"I fetched the mail for the bungalow, too," said the boy. "There's two or three letters for that Graham girl and one for Mrs. Bascom. She's housekeeper there, you know."

"Yes. Here, you might's well leave their mail along with mine. I'll see it's delivered, all right."

"Will you? Much obliged. Goin' to take it over yourself? Better look out, hadn't you? That Graham girl's a peach; all the fellers at the store's talkin' about her. Seems a pity she's wastin' her sassiety on a woman-hater like you; that's what they say. You ain't gettin' over your female hate, are you? Haw, haw!"

Mr. Atkins regarded his questioner with stern disapproval.

"There's some things—such as chronic sassiness—some folks never get over," he observed

caustically. "Though when green hides are too fresh they can be tanned; don't forget that, young feller. Any more chatty remarks you've got to heave over? No? Well, all right; then I'd be trottin' back home if I was you. Henry G.'ll have to shut up shop if you deprive him of your valuable services too long. Good day to you."

The driver, somewhat abashed, gathered up the reins. "I didn't mean to make you mad," he observed. "Anything in our line you want to order?"

"No. I'm cal'latin' to go to the village myself this afternoon, and if I want any more groceries I'll order 'em then. As for makin' me mad—well, don't you flatter yourself. A moskeeter can pester me, but he don't make me mad but once—and his funeral's held right afterwards. Now trot along and keep in the shade much as you can. You're so fresh the sun might spile you."

The boy, looking rather foolish, laughed and drove out of the yard. Seth, his arms full, went back to the kitchen. He dumped the packages and newspapers on the table and began sorting the letters.

"Here you are, Emeline," he said. "Here's Miss Graham's mail and somethin' for you."

"For me?" The housekeeper was surprised. "A letter for me! What is it, I wonder? Somethin' about sellin' the house maybe."

She took the letter from him and turned to the light before opening it. Seth sat down in the rocker and began inspecting his own assortment of circulars and papers. Suddenly he heard a sound from his companion. Glancing up he saw that she was leaning against the doorpost, the open letter in her hand, and on her face an expression which caused him to spring from his chair.

"What is it, Emeline?" he demanded. "Any bad news?"

She scarcely noticed him until he spoke again. Then she shook her head.

"No," she said slowly. "Nothin' but—but what I might have expected."

"But what is it? It is bad news. Can't I help you? Please let me, if I can. I—I'd like to."

She looked at him strangely, and then turned away. "I guess nobody can help me," she answered. "Least of all, you."

"Why not? I'd like to; honest, I would. If it's about that house business maybe I——"

"It ain't."

"Then what is it? Please, Emeline. I know

you don't think much of me. Maybe you've got good reasons; I'm past the place where I'd deny that. I—I've been feelin' meaner'n meaner every day lately. I—I don't know's I done right in runnin' off and leavin' you the way I did. Don't you s'pose you could give me another chance? Emeline, I——"

"Seth Bascom, what do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Emeline, you and me was mighty happy together once. Let's try it again. I will, if you will."

She was staring at him in good earnest now.

"Why, Seth!" she exclaimed. "What are you talkin' about? You—the chronic woman-hater!"

"That be blessed! I wa'n't really a woman-hater. I only thought I was. And—and I never hated you. Right through the worst of it I never did. Let's try it again, Emeline. You're in trouble. You need somebody to help you. Give me the chance."

There was a wistful look in her eyes; she seemed, or so he thought, to be wavering. But she shook her head. "I was in trouble before, Seth," she said, "and you didn't help me then. You run off and left me."

"You just as much as told me to go. You know you did."

"No, I didn't."

"Well, you didn't tell me to stay."

"It never seemed to me that a husband—if he was a man—would need to be coaxed to stay by his wife."

"But don't you care about me at all? You used to; I know it. And I always cared for you. What is it? Honest, Emeline, you never took any stock in that Sarah Ann Christy doin's, you know you didn't; now, did you?"

She was close to tears, but she smiled in spite of them.

"Well, no, Seth," she answered. "I will confess that Sarah Ann never worried me much."

"Then *don't* you care for me, Emeline?"

"I care for you much as I ever did. I never stopped carin' for you, fool that I am. But as for livin' with you again and runnin' the risk of——"

"You won't run any risk. You say I've improved, yourself. Your principal fault with me was, as I understand it, that I was too—too—somethin' or other. That I wa'n't man enough. By jiminy crimps, I'll show you that I'm a man! Give me

the chance, and nothin' nor nobody can make me leave you again. Besides, there's nobody to come between us now. We was all right until that—that Bennie D. came along. He was the one that took the starch out of me. Now he's out of the way. *He* won't bother us any more and . . . Why, what is it, Emeline?"

For she was looking at him with an expression even more strange. And again she shook her head.

"I guess," she began, and was interrupted by the jingle of the telephone bell.

The instrument was fastened to the kitchen wall, and the lightkeeper hastened to answer the ring.

"Testin' the wire after the storm, most likely," he explained, taking the receiver from the hook. "Hello! . . . Hello! . . . Yep, this is Eastboro Lights. . . . I'm the lightkeeper, yes. . . . Hey? . . . Miss Graham? . . . Right next door. . . . Yes. . . . *Who?*" Then, turning to his companion, he said in an astonished voice: "It's somebody wants to talk with you, Emeline."

"With *me?*" Mrs. Bascom could hardly believe it. "Are you sure?"

"So they say. Asked me if I could get you to the 'phone without any trouble. She's right here

now," he added, speaking into the transmitter. "I'll call her."

The housekeeper wonderingly took the receiver from his hand.

"Hello!" she began. "Yes, this is Mrs. Bascom. . . . Who? . . . What? . . . *Oh!*"

The last exclamation was almost a gasp, but Seth did not hear it. As she stepped forward to the 'phone she had dropped her letter. Atkins went over and picked it up. It lay face downward on the floor, and the last page, with the final sentence and signature, was uppermost. He could not help seeing it. "So we shall soon be together as of old. Your loving brother, Benjamin."

When Mrs. Bascom turned away from the 'phone after a rather protracted conversation she looked more troubled than ever. But Seth was not looking at her. He sat in the rocking-chair and did not move nor raise his head. She waited for him to speak, but he did not.

"Well," she said with a sigh, "I guess I must go. Good-by, Seth."

The lightkeeper slowly rose to his feet. "Emeline," he stammered, "you ain't goin' without——"

He stopped without finishing the sentence. She waited a moment and then finished it for him.

"I'll answer your question, if that's what you mean," she said. "And the answer is no. All things considered, I guess that's best."

"But Emeline, I—I——"

"Good-by, Seth."

"Sha'n't I," desperately, "sha'n't I see you again?"

"I expect to be around here for another day or so. But I can't see anythin' to be gained by our meetin'. Good-by."

Taking her letter and those addressed to Miss Graham from the table she went out of the kitchen. Seth followed her as far as the door, then turned and collapsed in the rocking-chair.

CHAPTER XIII

"JOHN BROWN" CHANGES HIS NAME

"SO we shall soon be together again as of old. Your loving brother, Benjamin."

The sentence which had met his eyes as he picked up the note which his caller had dropped was still before them, burned into his memory. Benjamin! "Bennie D."! the loathed and feared and hated Bennie D., cause of all the Bascom matrimonial heartbreaks, had written to say that he and his sister-in-law were soon to be together as they used to be. That meant that there had been no quarrel, but merely a temporary separation. That she and he were still friendly. That they had been in correspondence and that the "inventor" was coming back to take his old place as autocrat in the household with all his old influence over Emeline. Seth's new-found courage and manhood had vanished at the thought. Bennie D.'s name had scarcely been mentioned during the vari-

ous interviews between the lightkeeper and his wife. She had said her first husband's brother had been in New York for two years, and her manner of saying it led Seth to imagine a permanent separation following some sort of disagreement. And now! and now! He remembered Bennie D.'s superior airs, his polite sneers, his way of turning every trick to his advantage and of perverting and misrepresenting his, Seth's, most innocent speech and action into crimes of the first magnitude. He remembered the meaning of those last few months in the Cape Ann homestead. All his fiery determination to be what he had once been—Seth Bascom, the self-respecting man and husband—collapsed and vanished. He groaned in abject surrender. He could not go through it again; he was afraid. Of any other person on earth he would not have been, but the unexpected resurrection of Bennie D. made him a hesitating coward. Therefore he was silent when his wife left him, and he realized that his opportunity was gone, gone forever.

In utter misery and self-hatred he sat, with his head in his hands, beside the kitchen table until eleven o'clock. Then he rose, got dinner, and called Brown to eat it. He ate nothing himself, saying that he'd lost his appetite somehow or other.

After the meal he harnessed Joshua to the little wagon and started on his drive to Eastboro. "I'll be back early, I cal'late," were his last words as he drove out of the yard.

After he had gone, and Brown had finished clearing away and the other housekeeping tasks which were now such a burden, the substitute assistant went out to sit on the bench and smoke. The threatened easterly wind had begun to blow, and the sky was dark with tumbling clouds. The young man paid little attention to the weather, however. All skies were gloomy so far as he was concerned, and the darkest day was no blacker than his thoughts. Occasionally he glanced at the bungalow, and on one such occasion was surprised to see a carriage, one of the turnouts supplied by the Eastboro livery stable, roll up to its door and Mrs. Bascom, the housekeeper, emerge, climb to the seat beside the driver, and be driven away in the direction of the village. He idly wondered where she was going, but was not particularly interested. When, a half hour later, Ruth Graham left the bungalow and strolled off along the path at the top of the bluff, he was very much interested indeed. He realized, as he had been realizing for weeks, that he was more interested in that young woman

than in anything else on earth. Also, that he had no right—miserable outcast that he was—to be interested in her; and certainly it would be the wildest insanity to imagine that she could be interested in him.

For what the lightkeeper might say or do, in the event of his secret being discovered, he did not care in the least. He was long past that point. And for the breaking of their solemn compact he did not care either. Seth might or might not have played the traitor; that, too, was a matter of no importance. Seth himself was of no importance; neither was he. There was but one important person in the whole world, and she was strolling along the bluff path at that moment. Therefore he left his seat on the bench, hurried down the slope to the inner end of the cove, noting absently that the tide of the previous night must have been unusually high, climbed to the bungalow, turned the corner, and walked slowly in the direction of the trim figure in the blue suit, which was walking, even more slowly, just ahead of him.

It may be gathered that John Brown's feelings concerning the opposite sex had changed. They had, and he had changed in other ways, also. How much of a change had taken place he did not him-

self realize, until this very afternoon. He did not realize it even then until, after he and the girl in blue had met, and the customary expressions of surprise at their casual meeting had been exchanged, the young lady seated herself on a dune overlooking the tumbling sea and observed thoughtfully:

"I shall miss all this"—with a wave of her hand toward the waves—"next week, when I am back again in the city."

Brown's cap was in his hand as she began to speak. After she had finished he stooped to pick up the cap, which had fallen to the ground.

"You are going away—next week?" he said slowly.

"We are going to-morrow. I shall remain in Boston for a few days. Then I shall visit a friend in the Berkshires. After that I may join my brother in Europe; I'm not sure as to that."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes!"

There was another one of those embarrassing intervals of silence which of late seemed to occur so often in their conversation. Miss Graham, as usual, was the first to speak.

"Mr. Brown," she began. The substitute assistant interrupted her.

"Please don't call me that," he blurted involuntarily. "It—oh, confound it, it isn't my name!"

She should have been very much surprised. He expected her to be. Instead she answered quite calmly.

"I know it," she said.

"You *do?*"

"Yes. You are 'Russ' Brooks, aren't you?"

Russell Brooks, alias John Brown, dropped his cap again, but did not pick it up. He swallowed hard.

"How on earth did you know that?" he asked as soon as he could say anything.

"Oh, it was simple enough. I didn't really know; I only guessed. You weren't a real lightkeeper, that was plain. And you weren't used to washing dishes or doing housework—that," with the irrepressible curl of the corners of her lips, "was just as plain. When you told me that fib about meeting my brother here last summer I was sure you had met him somewhere, probably at college. So in my next letter to him I described you as well as I could, mentioned that you were as good or a better swimmer than he, and asked for particulars. He answered that the only fellow he

could think of who fitted your description was 'Russ' Brooks—Russell, I suppose—of New York; though what Russ Brooks was doing as lightkeeper's assistant at Eastboro Twin-Lights he *didn't* know. Neither did I. But then, *that* was not my business."

The substitute assistant did not answer: he could not, on such short notice.

"So," continued the girl, "I felt almost as if I had known you for a long time. You and Horace were such good friends at college, and he had often told me of you. I was very glad to meet you in real life, especially here, where I had no one but Mrs. Bascom to talk to; Mr. Atkins, by reason of his aversion to my unfortunate sex, being barred."

Mr. Brown's—or Mr. Brooks'—next speech harked back to her previous one.

"I'll tell you while I'm here," he began.

"You needn't, unless you wish," she said. "I have no right to know"—adding, with characteristic femininity, "though I'm dying to."

"But I want you to know. As I told Atkins when I first came, I haven't murdered anyone and I haven't stolen anything. I'm not a crook running from justice. I'm just a plain idiot who fell

overboard from a steamer and"—bitterly—"hadn't the good luck to drown."

She made no comment, and he began his story, telling it much as he had told it to the lightkeeper.

"There!" he said in conclusion, "that's the whole fool business. That's why I'm here. No need to ask what you think of it, I suppose."

She was silent, gazing at the breakers. He drew his own conclusions from her silence.

"I see," he said. "Well, I admit it. I'm a low down chump. Still, if I had it to do over again, I should do pretty much the same. A few things differently, but in general the very same."

"What would you do differently?" she asked, still without looking at him.

"For one thing, I wouldn't run away. I'd stay and face the music. Earn my living or starve."

"And now you're going to stay here?"

"No longer than I can help. If I get the appointment as assistant keeper I'll begin to save every cent I can. Just as soon as I get enough to warrant risking it I'll head for Boston once more and begin the earning or starving process. And," with a snap of his jaws, "I don't intend to starve."

"You won't go back to your father?"

"If he sees fit to beg my pardon and acknowledge that I was right—not otherwise. And he must do it of his own accord. I told him that when I walked out of his office. It was my contribution to our fond farewell. His was that he would see me damned first. Possibly he may."

She smiled.

"You must have been a charming pair of pepper pots," she observed. "And the young lady—what of her?"

"She knows that I am fired, cut off even without the usual shilling. That will be quite sufficient for her, I think."

"How do you know it will? How do you know she might not have been willing to wait while you earned that living you are so sure is coming?"

"Wait? She wait for me? Ann Davidson wait for a man without a cent while he tried to earn a good many dollars? Humph! you amuse me."

"Why not? You didn't give her a chance. You calmly took it for granted that she wanted only money and social position and you walked off and left her. How do you know she wouldn't have liked you better for telling her just how you felt. If a girl really cared for a man it seems to me that she would be willing to wait for him, years

and years if it were necessary, provided that, during that time, he was trying his best for her."

"But—but—she isn't that kind of a girl."

"How do you know? You didn't put her to the test. You owed her that. It seems to me you owe it to her now."

The answer to this was on his tongue. It was ready behind his closed lips, eager to burst forth. That he didn't love the Davidson girl, never had loved her. That during the past month he had come to realize there was but one woman in the wide world for him. And did that woman mean what she said about waiting years—and years—provided she cared? And did she care?

He didn't utter one word of this. He wanted to, but it seemed so preposterous. Such an idiotic, outrageous thing to ask. Yet it is probable that he would have asked it if the young lady had given him the chance. But she did not; after a sidelong glance at his face, she hurriedly rose from the rock and announced that she must be getting back to the house.

"I have some packing to do," she explained; "and, besides, I think it is going to rain."

"But, Miss Graham, I——"

A big drop of rain splashing upon his shoe con-

firmed the weather prophecy. She began to walk briskly toward the bungalow, and he walked at her side.

"Another storm," she said. "I should think the one we have just passed through was sufficient for a while. I hope Mrs. Bascom won't get wet."

"She has gone to the village, hasn't she?"

"Yes. She has received some message or other—I don't know how it came—which sent her off in a hurry. A livery carriage came for her. She will be back before night."

"Atkins has gone, too. He had some errands, I believe. I can't make out what has come over him of late. He has changed greatly. He used to be so jolly and good-humored, except when female picnickers came. Now he is as solemn as an owl. When he went away he scarcely spoke a word. I thought he seemed to be in trouble, but when I asked him, he shut me up so promptly that I didn't press the matter."

"Did he? That's odd. Mrs. Bascom seemed to be in trouble, too. I thought she had been crying when she came out of her room to go to the carriage. She denied it, but her eyes looked red. What can be the matter?"

"I don't know."

"Nor I. Mr.—er—Brooks— Or shall I still call you 'Brown'?"

"No. Brown is dead; drowned. Let him stay so."

"Very well. Mr. Brooks, has it occurred to you that your Mr. Atkins is a peculiar character? That he acts peculiarly?"

"He has acted peculiarly ever since I knew him. But to what particular peculiarity do you refer?"

"His queer behavior. Several times I have seen him—I am almost sure it was he—hiding or crouching behind the sand hills at the rear of our bungalow."

"You have? Why, I——"

He hesitated. Before he could go on or she continue, the rain came in a deluge. They reached the porch just in time.

"Well, I'm safe and reasonably dry," she panted. "I'm afraid you will be drenched before you get to the lights. Don't you want an umbrella?"

"No. No, indeed, thank you."

"Well, you must hurry then. Good-by."

"But, Miss Graham," anxiously, "I shall see you again before you go. To-morrow, at bathing time, perhaps?"

"Judging by the outlook just at present, bathing will be out of the question to-morrow."

"But I want to see you. I must."

She shook her head doubtfully. "I don't know," she said. "I shall be very busy getting ready to leave; but perhaps we may meet again."

"We must. I—Miss Graham, I——"

She had closed the door. He ran homeward through the rain, the storm which soaked him to the skin being but a trifle compared to the tornado in his breast.

He spent the balance of the day somehow, he could not have told how. The rain and wind continued; six o'clock came, and Seth should have returned an hour before, but there was no sign of him. He wondered if Mrs. Bascom had returned. He had not seen the carriage, but she might have come while he was inside the house. The lightkeeper's nonappearance began to worry him a trifle.

At seven, as it was dark, he took upon himself the responsibility of climbing the winding stairs in each tower and lighting the great lanterns. It was the first time he had done it, but he knew how, and the duty was successfully accomplished.

Then, as Atkins was still absent and there was nothing to do but wait, he sat in the chair in the kitchen and thought. Occasionally, and it showed the trend of his thoughts, he rose and peered from the window across the dark to the bungalow. In the living room of the latter structure a light burned. At ten it was extinguished.

At half past ten he went to Seth's bedroom, found a meager assortment of pens, ink and note paper, returned to the kitchen, sat down by the table and began to write.

For an hour he thought, wrote, tore up what he had written, and began again. At last the result of his labor read something like this:

"DEAR MISS GRAHAM:

"I could not say it this afternoon, although if you had stayed I think I should. But I must say it now or it may be too late. I can't let you go without saying it. I love you. Will you wait for me? It may be a very long wait, although God knows I mean to try harder than I have ever tried for anything in my life. If I live I will make something of myself yet, with you as my inspiration. You know you said if a girl really cared for a man she would willingly wait years for him. Do you

care for me as much as that? With you, or for you, I believe I can accomplish anything. *Do* you care?

"Russell Brooks."

He put this in an envelope, sealed and addressed it, and without stopping to put on either cap or raincoat went out in the night.

The rain was still falling, although not as heavily, but the wind was coming in fierce squalls. He descended the path to the cove, floundering through the wet bushes. At the foot of the hill he was surprised to find the salt marsh a sea of water not a vestige of ground above the surface. This was indeed a record-breaking tide, such as he had never known before. He did not pause to reflect upon tides or such trivialities, but, with a growl at being obliged to make the long detour, he rounded the end of the cove and climbed up to the door of the bungalow. Under the edge of that door he tucked the note he had written. As soon as this was accomplished he became aware that he had expressed himself very clumsily. He had not written as he might. A dozen brilliant thoughts came to him. He must rewrite that note at all hazards.

So he spent five frantic minutes trying to coax that envelope from under the door. But, in his care to push it far enough, it had dropped beyond the sill, and he could not reach it. The thing was done for better or for worse. Perfectly certain that it was for worse, he splashed mournfully back to the lights. In the lantern room of the right-hand tower he spent the remainder of the night, occasionally wandering out on the gallery to note the weather.

The storm was dying out. The squalls were less and less frequent, and the rain had been succeeded by a thick fog. The breakers pounded in the dark below him, and from afar the foghorns moaned and wailed. It was a bad night, a night during which no lightkeeper should be absent from his post. And where was Seth?

CHAPTER XIV

"BENNIE D."

SETH'S drive to Eastboro was a dismal journey. Joshua pounded along over the wet sand or through ruts filled with water, and not once during the trip was he ordered to "Giddap" or "Show some signs of life." Not until the first scattered houses of the village were reached did the lightkeeper awaken from his trance sufficiently to notice that the old horse was limping slightly with the right forefoot.

"Hello!" exclaimed Seth. "What's the matter with you, Josh?"

Joshua slopped on, but this was a sort of three-legged progress. The driver leaned forward and then pulled on the reins.

"Whoa!" he ordered. "Stand still!"

Joshua stood still, almost with enthusiasm. Seth tucked the end of the reins between the whip socket and the dashboard, and swung out of the

wagon to make an examination. Lifting the lame foot, he found the trouble at once. The shoe was loose.

"Humph!" he soliloquized. "Cal'late you and me'll have to give Benijah a job. Well," climbing back into the vehicle, "I said I'd never give him another after the row we had about the last, but I ain't got ambition enough to go clear over to the Denboro blacksmith's. *I* don't care. I don't care about nothin' any more. Giddap."

Benijah Ellis's little, tumble-down blacksmith shop was located in the main street of Eastboro, if that hit-or-miss town can be said to possess a main street. Atkins drove up to its door, before which he found Benijah and a group of loungers inspecting an automobile, the body of which had been removed in order that the engine and running gear might be the easier reached. The blacksmith was bending over the car, his head and shoulders down amidst the machinery; a big wrench was in his hand, and other wrenches, hammers, and tools of various sizes were scattered on the ground beside him.

"Hello, Benije," grunted Seth.

Ellis removed his nose from its close proximity to the gear shaft and straightened up. He

was a near-sighted, elderly man, and wore spectacles. Just now his hands, arms, and apron were covered with grease and oil, and, as he wiped his forehead with the hand not holding the wrench, he left a wide mourning band across it.

"Well?" he panted. "Who is it? Who wants me?"

One of the loafers, who had been assisting the blacksmith by holding his pipe while he dove into the machinery, languidly motioned toward the new arrival. Benijah adjusted his spectacles and walked over to the wagon.

"Who is it?" he asked crossly. Then, as he recognized his visitor, he grunted: "Ugh! it's you, hey Well, what do *you* want?"

"Want you to put a new shoe on this horse of mine," replied Seth, not too graciously.

"Is that so! Well, I'm busy."

"I don't care if you be. I guess you ain't so busy you can't do a job of work. If you are, you're richer'n I ever heard you was."

"I want to know! Maybe I'm particular who I work for, Seth Atkins."

"Maybe you are. I ain't so particular; if I was, I wouldn't come here, I tell you that. This

horse of mine's got a loose shoe, and I want him attended to quick."

"Thought you said you'd never trust me with another job."

"I ain't trustin' you now. I'll be here while it's done. And I ain't askin' you to trust me, neither. I'll pay cash—cash, d'ye understand?"

The bystanders grinned. Mr. Ellis's frown deepened. "I'm busy," he declared, with importance. "I've got Mr. Delancey Barry's automobile to fix, and I can't stop to bother with horses—specially certain kind of horses."

This sneer at Joshua roused his owner's ire. He dropped the reins and sprang to the ground.

"See here, Benije Ellis," he growled, advancing upon the repairer of automobiles, who retreated a step or two with promptness. "I don't care what you're fixin', nor whose it is, neither. I guess 'twill be 'fixed' all right when you get through with it, but that ain't neither here nor there. And it don't make no difference if it does belong to Mr. Barry. If 'twas Elijah's chariot of fire 'twould be just the same. That auto won't be done this afternoon, and nobody expects it to be. Here's my horse sufferin' to be shod; I want him shod and I've got the money to pay for it.

When it's winter time you're around cryin' that you can't earn money to pay your bills. Now, just because it's summer and there's city bigbugs in the neighborhood innocent enough to let you tinker with their autos—though they'll never do it but once—I don't propose to be put off. If you won't shoe this horse of mine I'll know it's because you've got so much money you don't need more. And if that's the case, there's a whole lot of folks would be mighty glad to know it—Henry G. Goodspeed for one. I'm goin' up to his store now. Shall I tell him?"

This was a shot in the bull's-eye. Mr. Ellis owed a number of bills, had owed them for a long time, and Mr. Goodspeed's was by no means the smallest. The loafers exchanged winks, and the blacksmith's manner became more conciliatory.

"I didn't say I wouldn't do it for you, Seth," he pleaded. "I'm always willin' to do your work. You're the one that's been complainin'."

"Ugh! Well, I'm likely to complain some more, but the complaint's one thing, and the need's another. I'm like Joel Knowles—he said when he couldn't get whisky he worried along best he could with bay rum. I need a blacksmith,

and if I can't get a real one I'll put up with an imitation. Will you shoe this horse for me?"

"Course I'll shoe him. But I can't do it this minute. I've got this consarned machine," waving a hand toward the automobile, "out of door here and all to pieces. And it's goin' to rain. Just let me put enough of it together so's I can shove it into the shop out of the wet, and then I'll tackle your job. You leave your horse and team here and go do your other errands. He'll be ready when you come back."

So on this basis the deal was finally made. Seth was reluctant to trust the precious Joshua out of his sight, but, after some parley, he agreed to do so. The traces were unfastened, and the animal was led into the shop, the carriage was backed under a shed, and the lightkeeper went away promising to be back in an hour. As soon as he had gone, Ellis dived again into the vitals of the auto.

The argument with the blacksmith had one satisfactory result so far as Seth was concerned. In a measure it afforded a temporary vent for his feelings. He was moderately agreeable during his brief stay at the grocery store, and when his orders were given and he found the hour

not half over, he strolled out to walk about the village. And then, alone once more, all his misery and heartache returned. He strode along, his head down, scarcely speaking to acquaintances whom he met, until he reached the railway station, where he sat down on the baggage truck to mentally review, over and over again, the scene with Emeline and the dreadful collapse of his newborn hopes and plans.

As he sat there, the door of the station opened and a man emerged, a man evidently not a native of Eastboro. He was dressed in a rather loud, but somewhat shabby, suit of summer plaid, his straw hat was set a trifle over one ear, and he was smoking the stump of a not too fragrant cigar. Altogether he looked like a sporting character under a temporary financial cloud, but the cloud did not dim his self-satisfaction nor shadow his magnificent complaisance. He regarded the section of Eastboro before him with condescending scorn, and then, catching sight of the doleful figure on the baggage truck, strolled over and addressed it.

"I say, my friend," he observed briskly, "have you a match concealed about your person? If so, I——"

He stopped short, for Mr. Atkins, after one languid glance in his direction, had sprung from the truck and was gazing at him as if he was some apparition, some figure in a nightmare, instead of his blasé self. And he, as he looked at the lightkeeper's astounded countenance, dropped the cigar stump from his fingers and stepped backward in alarmed consternation.

"You—you—*you?*" gasped Seth.

"*You!*" repeated the stranger.

"You!" cried Seth again; not a brilliant nor original observation, but, under the circumstances, excusable, for the nonchalant person in the plaid suit was Emeline Bascom's brother-in-law, the genius, the "inventor," the one person whom he hated—and feared—more than anyone else in the world—Bennie D. himself.

There was a considerable interval during which neither of the pair spoke. Seth, open-mouthed and horror-stricken, was incapable of speech, and the inventor's astonishment seemed to be coupled with a certain nervousness, almost as if he feared a physical assault. However, as the lightkeeper made no move, and his fists remained open, the nervousness disappeared, and Bennie D. characteristically took command of the situation.

"Hum!" he observed musingly. "Hum! May I ask what you are doing here?"

"Huh—hey?" was Seth's incoherent reply.

"I ask what you are doing here? Have you followed me?"

"Fol-follered you? No."

"You're sure of that, are you?"

"Yes, I be." Seth did not ask what Bennie D. was doing there. Already that question was settled in his mind. The brother-in-law had found out that Emeline was living next door to the man she married, that her summer engagement was over, and he had come to take her away.

"Well?" queried the inventor sharply, "if you haven't followed me, what are you doing here? What do you mean by being here?"

"I belong here," desperately. "I work here."

"You do? And may I ask what particular being is fortunate enough to employ you?"

"I'm keeper down to the lighthouses, if you want to know. But I cal'late you know it already."

Bennie D.'s coolness was not proof against this. He started.

"The lighthouses?" he repeated. "The—what is it they call them?—the Twin-Lights?"

"Yes. You know it; what's the use of askin' fool questions?"

The inventor had not known it—until that moment, and he took time to consider before making another remark. His sister-in-law was employed as housekeeper at some bungalow or other situated in close proximity to the Twin-Lights; that he had discovered since his arrival on the morning train. Prior to that he had known only that she was in Eastboro for the summer. Before that he had not been particularly interested in her location. Since the day, two years past, when, having decided that he had used her and her rapidly depleting supply of cash as long as was safe or convenient, he had unceremoniously left her and gone to New York to live upon money supplied by a credulous city gentleman, whom his smooth tongue had interested in his "inventions," he had not taken the trouble even to write to Emeline. But within the present month the New Yorker's credulity and his "loans" had ceased to be material assets. Then Bennie D., face to face with the need of funds, remembered his sister and the promise given his dead brother that he should be provided with a home as long as she had one.

He journeyed to Cape Ann and found, to his dismay, that she was no longer there. After some skillful detective work, he learned of the Eastboro engagement and wrote the letter—a piteous, appealing letter, full of brotherly love and homesickness—which, held back by the storm, reached Mrs. Bascom only that morning. In it he stated that he was on his way to her and was counting the minutes until they should be together once more. And he had, as soon after his arrival in the village as possible, 'phoned to the Lights and spoken with her. Her tone, as she answered, was, he thought, alarmingly cold. It had made him apprehensive, and he wondered if his influence over her was on the wane. But now —now he understood. Her husband—her husband, of all people—had been living next door to her all summer. No doubt she knew he was there when she took the place. Perhaps they had met by mutual agreement. Why, this was appalling! It might mean anything. And yet Seth did not look triumphant or even happy. Bennie D. resolved to show no signs of perturbation or doubt, but first to find out, if he could, the truth, and then to act accordingly.

" Mr. Bascom—" he began. The lightkeeper, greatly alarmed, interrupted him.

" Hush!" he whispered. " Don't say that. That ain't my name—down here."

" Indeed? What is your name?"

" Down here they call me Seth Atkins."

Bennie D. looked puzzled. Then his expression changed. He was relieved. When he 'phoned to the Lights—using the depot 'phone—the station agent had seemed to consider his calling a woman over the lighthouse wire great fun. The lightkeeper, so the agent said, was named Atkins, and was a savage woman-hater. He would not see a woman, much less speak to one; it was a standing joke in the neighborhood, Seth's hatred of females. That seemed to prove that Emeline and her husband were not reconciled and living together, at least. Possibly their being neighbors was merely a coincidence. If so, he might not have come too late. When he next addressed his companion it was in a different tone and without the " Mister."

" Bascom—or—er—Atkins," he said sharply, " I hoped—I sincerely hoped that you and I might not meet during my short stay here; but, as we have met, I think it best that we should

understand each other. Suppose we walk over to that clump of trees on the other side of the track. We shall be alone there, and I can say what is necessary. I don't wish—even when I remember your behavior toward my sister—to humiliate you in the town where you may be trying to lead a better life. Come."

He led the way, and Seth, yielding as of old to this man's almost hypnotic command over him and still bewildered by the unexpected meeting, followed like a whipped dog. Under the shelter of the trees they paused.

"Now then," said Bennie D., "perhaps you'll tell me what you mean by decoying my sister down here in my absence, when I was not present to protect her. What do you mean by it?"

Seth stared at him uncomprehendingly. "Decoyin' her?" he repeated. "I never decoyed her. I've been here ever since I left—left you and her that night. I never asked her to come. I didn't know she was comin'. And she didn't know I was here until—until a month or so ago. I——"

Bennie D. held up a hand. He was delighted by this piece of news, but he did not show it.

"That will do," he said. "I understand all

that. But since then—since then? What do you mean by trying to influence her as you have? Answer me!"

The lightkeeper rubbed his forehead.

"I ain't tried to influence her," he declared. "She and me have scarcely seen each other. Nobody knows that we was married, not even Miss Graham nor the young feller that's—that's my helper at the lights. You must know that. She must have wrote you. What are you talkin' about?"

She had not written; he had received no letters from her during the two years, but again the wily "genius" was equal to the occasion. He looked wise and nodded.

"Of course," he said importantly. "Of course. Certainly."

He hesitated, not knowing exactly what his next move should be. And Seth, having had time to collect, in a measure, his scattered wits, began to do some thinking on his own account.

"Say," he said suddenly, "if you knew all this aforehand, what are you askin' these questions for?"

"That," Bennie D.'s gesture was one of lofty disdain, "is my business."

"I want to know! Well, then, maybe I've got some business of my own. Who made my business your business? Hey?"

"The welfare of my sister——"

"Never you mind your sister. You're talkin' with me now. And you ain't got me penned up in a house, neither. By jiminy crimps!" His anger boiled over, and, to the inventor's eyes, he began to look alarmingly alive. "By jiminy crimps!" repeated Seth, "I've been prayin' all these years to meet you somewheres alone, and now I've a good mind to—to——"

His big fist closed. Bennie D. stepped backward out of reach.

"Bascom—" he cried, "don't——"

"Don't you call me that!"

"Bascom—" The inventor was thoroughly frightened, and his voice rose almost to a shout.

The lightkeeper's wrath vanished at the sound of the name. If any native of Eastboro, if the depot master on the other side of the track, should hear him addressed as "Bascom," the fat would be in the fire for good and all. The secret he had so jealously guarded would be out, and all the miserable story would, sooner or later, be known.

"Don't call me Bascom," he begged. Er—please don't."

Bennie D.'s courage returned. Yet he realized that if a trump card was to be played it must be then. This man was dangerous, and, somehow or other, his guns must be spiked. A brilliant idea occurred to him. Exactly how much of the truth Seth knew he was not sure, but he took the risk.

"Very well then—Atkins," he said contemptuously. "I am not used to aliases—not having dealt with persons finding it necessary to employ them—and I forget. But before this disagreeable interview is ended I wish you to understand thoroughly why I am here. I am here to protect my sister and to remove her from your persecution. I am here to assist her in procuring a divorce."

"A divorce! A *divorce!* Good heavens above!"

"Yes, sir," triumphantly, "a divorce from the man she was trapped into marrying and who deserted her. You did desert her, you can't deny that. So long as she remains your wife, even in name, she is liable to persecution from you. She understands this. She and I are to see a lawyer at once. That is why I am here."

Seth was completely overwhelmed. A divorce! A case for the papers to print, and all of Ostable county to read!

"I—I—I—" he stammered, and then added weakly, "I don't believe it. She wouldn't . . . There ain't no lawyer here."

Then we shall seek the one nearest here. Emeline understands. I 'phoned her this morning."

"Was it *you* that 'phoned?"

"It was. Now—er—Atkins, I am disposed to be as considerate of your welfare as possible. I know that any publicity in this matter might prejudice you in the eyes of your—of the government officials. I shall not seek publicity, solely on your account. The divorce will be obtained privately, provided—*provided* you remain out of sight and do not interfere. I warn you, therefore, not to make trouble or to attempt to see my sister again. If you do—well, if you do, the consequences will be unpleasant for you. Do you understand?"

Seth understood, or thought he did. He groaned and leaned heavily against a tree trunk.

"You understand, do you?" repeated Bennie D. "I see that you do. Very good then. I have nothing more to say. I advise that you

remain—er—in seclusion for the next few days. Good-by."

He gave a farewell glance at the crushed figure leaning against the tree. Then he turned on his heel and walked off.

Seth remained where he was for perhaps ten minutes, not moving a muscle. Then he seemed to awaken, looked anxiously in the direction of the depot to make sure that no one was watching, pulled his cap over his eyes, jammed his hands into his pockets, and started to walk across the fields. He had no fixed destination in mind, had no idea where he was going except that he must go somewhere, that he could not keep still.

He stumbled along, through briers and bushes, paying no attention to obstacles such as fences or stone walls until he ran into them, when he climbed over and went blindly on. A mile from Eastboro, and he was alone in a grove of scrub pines. Here he stopped short, struck his hands together, and groaned aloud:

"I don't believe it! I don't believe it!"

For he was beginning not to believe it. At first he had not thought of doubting Bennie D.'s statement concerning the divorce. Now, as his thoughts became clearer, his doubts grew. His

wife had not mentioned the subject in their morning interview. Possibly she would not have done so in any event, but, as the memory of her behavior and speech became clearer in his mind, it seemed to him that she could not have kept such a secret. She had been kinder, had seemed to him more—yes, almost—why, when he asked her to be his again, to give him another chance, she had hesitated. She had not said no at once, she hesitated. If she was about to divorce him, would she have acted in such a way? It hardly seemed possible.

Then came the letter and the telephone message. It was after these that she had said no with decision. Perhaps . . . was it possible that she had known of her brother-in-law's coming only then? Now that he thought of it, she had not gone away at once after the talk over the 'phone. She had waited a moment as if for him to speak. He, staggered and paralyzed by the sight of his enemy's name in that letter, had not spoken and then she . . . He did not believe she was seeking a divorce! It was all another of Bennie D.'s lies!

But suppose she was seeking it. Or suppose—for he knew the persuasive power of that glib

tongue only too well—suppose her brother-in-law should persuade her to do it. Should he sit still —in seclusion, as his late adviser had counseled —and let this irrevocable and final move be made? After a divorce—Seth's idea of divorces were vague and Puritanical—there would be no hope. He and Emeline could never come together after that. And he must give her up and all his hopes of happiness, all that he had dreamed of late, would be but dreams, never realities. No! he could not give them up. He would not. Publicity, scandal, everything, he could face, but he would not give his wife up without a fight. What should he do?

For a long time he paced up and down beneath the pines trying to plan, to come to some decision. All that he could think of was to return to the Lights, to go openly to the bungalow, see Emeline and make one last appeal. Bennie D. might be there, but if he was—well, by jiminy crimps, let him look out, that's all!

He had reached this point in his meditations when the wind, which had been steadily increasing and tossing the pinetops warningly, suddenly became a squall which brought with it a flurry of rain. He started and looked up. The sky

was dark, it was late in the afternoon, and the storm he had prophesied had arrived.

Half an hour later he ran, panting and wet, into the blacksmith's shop. The automobile was standing in the middle of the floor, and Mr. Ellis was standing beside it, perspiring and troubled.

"Where's Joshua?" demanded Seth.

"Hey?" inquired the blacksmith absently.

"Where's my horse? Is he ready?"

Benijah wiped his forehead.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "By . . . gosh!"

"What are you b'goshin' about?"

"Seth—I don't know what you'll say to me—but—but I declare I forgot all about your horse."

"You *forgot* about him?"

"Yes. You see that thing?" pointing pathetically at the auto. "Well, sir, that pesky thing's breakin' my heart—to say nothin' of my back. I got it apart all right, no trouble about that. And by good rights I've got it together again, leastways it looks so. Yet, by time," in distracted agitation, "there's a half bucket of bolts and nuts and odds and ends that ain't in it yet —left over, you might say. And I can't find ary

place to put one of 'em. Do you wonder I forget trifles?"

Trifles! the shoeing of Joshua a trifle! The lightkeeper had been suffering for an opportunity to blow off steam, and the opportunity was here. Benijah withered under the blast.

"S-sh-sh! sh-sh!" he pleaded. "Land sakes, Seth Atkins, stop it! I don't blame you for bein' mad, but you nor nobody else sha'n't talk to me that way. I'll fix your horse in five minutes. Yes, sir, in five minutes. Shut up now, or I won't do it at all!"

He rushed over to the stall in the rear of the shop, woke Joshua from the sweet slumber of old age, and led him to the halter beside the forge. The lightkeeper, being out of breath, had nothing further to say at the moment.

"What's the matter with all you lighthouse folks?" asked Benijah, anxious to change the subject. "What's possessed the whole lot of you to come to the village at one time? Whoa, boy, stand still!"

"The whole lot of us?" repeated Seth. "What do you mean?"

"Mean I've seen two of you at least this afternoon. That Bascom woman, housekeeper

at the Graham bungalow she is, went past here twice. Fust time she was in one of Snow's livery buggies, Snow's boy drivin' her. Then, about an hour ago, she went by again, but the boy'd gone, and there was another feller pilotin' the team—a stranger, nobody I ever see afore."

Seth's red face turned pale. "What?" he cried. "Em—Mrs. Bascom ridin' with a stranger! What sort of a stranger?"

"Oh, a feller somewheres between twenty and fifty. Smooth-faced critter with a checked suit and a straw hat. . . . What on earth's the matter with you now?"

For the lightkeeper was shaking from head to foot.

"Did—did—which way was they goin'? Back to the Lights or—or where?"

"No, didn't seem to be goin' to the Lights at all. They went on the other road. Seemed to be headin' for Denboro if they kept on as they started. . . . Seth Atkins, have you turned loony?"

Seth did not answer. With a leap he landed at Joshua's head, unhooked the halter, and ran out of the shop leading the horse. The astonished blacksmith followed as far as the door.

Seth was backing the animal into his wagon, which stood beneath the shed. He fastened the traces with trembling fingers.

"What in the world has struck you?" shouted Ellis. "Ain't you goin' to have that shoe fixed? He can't travel that way. Seth! Seth Atkins! . . . By time, he *is* crazy!"

Seth did not deny the charge. Climbing into the wagon, he took up the reins.

"Are you sure and sartin' 'twas the Denboro road they took?" he demanded.

"Who took? That feller and the Bascom woman? Course I am, but . . . Well, I swan!"

For the lightkeeper waited to hear no more. He struck the unsuspecting Joshua with the end of the reins and, with a jump, the old horse started forward. Another moment, and the lighthouse wagon was splashing and rattling through the pouring rain along the road leading to Denboro.

CHAPTER XV

THE VOYAGE OF THE DAISY M.

DENBORO is many long miles from Eastboro, and the road, even in the best of weather, is not a good one. It winds and twists and climbs and descends through woods and over hills. There are stretches of marshy hollows where the yellow clay needs but a little moistening to become a paste which sticks to wheels and hoofs and makes traveling, even behind a young and spirited horse, a disheartening progress.

Joshua was neither young nor spirited. And the weather could not have been much worse. The three days' storm had soaked everything, and the clay-bottomed puddles were near kin to quicksands. As the lighthouse wagon descended the long slope at the southern end of the village and began the circle of the inner extremity of Eastboro Back Harbor, Seth realized that his

journey was to be a hard one. The rain, driven by the northeast wind, came off the water in blinding gusts, and the waves in the harbor were tipped with white. Also, although the tide was almost at its lowest, streaks of seaweed across the road showed where it had reached that forenoon, and prophesied even a greater flood that night. He turned his head and gazed up the harbor to where it narrowed and became Pounddug Slough. In the Slough, near its ocean extremity, his old schooner, the *Daisy M.*, lay stranded. He had not visited her for a week, and he wondered if the "spell of weather" had injured her to any extent. This speculation, however, was but momentary. The *Daisy M.* must look out for herself. His business was to reach Judge Gould's, in Denboro, before Mrs. Bascom and Bennie D. could arrange with that prominent citizen and legal light for the threatened divorce.

That they had started for Judge Gould's he did not doubt for a moment. "I shall seek the nearest lawyer," Bennie D. had said. And the judge was the nearest. They must be going there, or why should they take that road? Neither did he doubt now that their object was to secure the divorce. How divorces were se-

cured, or how long it took to get one, Seth did not know. His sole knowledge on that subject was derived from the newspapers and comic weeklies, and he remembered reading of places in the West where lawyers with the necessary blanks in their pockets met applicants at the arrival of one train and sent them away, rejoicing and free, on the next.

"You jump right off the cars and then
Turn round and jump right on again."

This fragment of a song, sung at a "moving-picture" show in the town hall, and resung many times thereafter by Ezra Payne, John Brown's predecessor as assistant keeper at the lights, recurred to him as he urged the weary Joshua onward. So far as Seth knew, the Reno custom might be universal. At any rate, he must get to Judge Gould's before Emeline and her brother-in-law left there. What he should do when he arrived and found them there was immaterial; he must get there, that was all.

Eastboro Back Harbor was left behind, and the long stretch of woods beyond was entered. Joshua, his hoofs swollen by the sticky clay to yellow cannon balls, plodded on, but, in spite of

commands and pleadings—the lightkeeper possessed no whip and would not have used one if he had—he went slower and slower. He was walking now, and limping sadly on the foot where the loose shoe hung by its bent and broken nails.

Five miles, six, seven, and the limp was worse than ever. Seth, whose conscience smote him, got out of the carriage into the rain and mud and attempted repairs, using a stone as a hammer. This seemed to help matters some, but it was almost dark when the granite block marking the township line was passed, and the windows in the houses were alight when he pulled up at the judge's door.

The judge himself answered the knock, or series of knocks. He seemed much surprised to find the keeper of Eastboro Twin-Lights standing on his front step.

"Why, hello, Atkins!" he cried. "What in the world are you doing over here? a night like this!"

"Has—has Mrs. Bascom been here? Is she here now?" panted Seth anxiously.

"Mrs. Bascom? Who is Mrs. Bascom?"

"She—she's a friend of mine. She and—and

a relation of hers was comin' over here to see you on business. Ain't they here? Ain't they been here?"

"No. No one has been here this afternoon. I've been in since one o'clock, and not a soul has called, on business or otherwise."

The lightkeeper could scarcely believe it.

"You're sure?" he demanded.

"Certainly. If they came before one my wife would have told me, I think. I'll ask her."

"No, no," hastily. "You needn't. If they ain't been since one they ain't been. But I don't understand. . . . There's no other lawyer nigh here, is there?"

"No; none nearer than Bayport."

"My land! My *land!* Then—then I'm out of soundin's somehow. They never came for it, after all."

"Came for what?"

"Nothin', nothin', I guess," with a sickly smile. "I've made some sort of mistake, though I don't know how. Benije must have . . . I'll break that feller's neck; I will!"

The lawyer began to share the blacksmith's opinion that his caller had gone crazy.

"Come in, Atkins," he urged. "Come in out

of the wet. What *is* the matter? What are you doing here at this time of night so far from the Lights? Is it anything serious? Come in and tell me about it."

But Seth, instead of accepting the invitation, stared at him aghast. Then, turning about, he leaped down the steps, ran to the wagon and climbed in.

"Giddap!" he shouted. Poor, tired Joshua lifted his clay-daubed hoofs.

"You're not going back?" cried Gould. "Hold on, Atkins! Wait!"

But Seth did not wait. Already he had turned his horse's head toward Eastboro, and was driving off. The lawyer stood still, amazedly looking after him. Then he went into the house and spent the next quarter of an hour trying to call the Twin-Lights by telephone. As the northeast wind had finished what the northwest one had begun and the wire was down, his attempt was unsuccessful. He gave it up after a time and sat down to discuss the astonishing affair with his wife. He was worried.

But his worriment was as nothing compared to Seth's. The lawyer's reference to the Lights had driven even matrimonial troubles from the

Atkins mind. The lights! the Twin-Lights! It was long past the time for them to be lit, and there was no one to light them but Brown, a green hand. Were they lit at all? If not, heaven knew what might happen or had happened already.

He had thought of this before, of course, had vaguely realized that he was betraying his trust, but then he had not cared. The Lights, his position as keeper, everything, were side issues compared with the one thing to be done, the getting to Denboro. He had reached Denboro and found his journey all a mistake; his wife and Bennie D. had not, apparently, visited that village; perhaps had not even started for it. Therefore, in a measure relieved, he thought of other things. He was many miles from his post of duty, and now his sole idea was to get back to it.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Hepsibah Deacon, a widow living in a little house in the woods on the top of the hill on the Denboro side of Eastboro Back Harbor, with no neighbors for a mile in either direction, was awakened by shouts under her bedroom window. Opening that window she thrust forth her head.

"Who is it?" she demanded quaveringly. "What's the matter? Is anything afire?"

From the blackness of the rain and fog emerged a vague shape.

"It's me, Mrs. Deacon; Seth Atkins, down to the Lights, you know. I've left my horse and carriage in your barn. Josh—he's the horse—is gone lame and played himself out. He can't walk another step. I've unharnessed him and left him in the stall. He'll be all right. I've given him some water and hay. Just let him stay there, if it ain't too much trouble, and I'll send for him to-morrer and pay for his keep. It's all right, ain't it? Much obliged. Good night."

Before the frightened widow could ask a question or utter a word he was gone, ploughing down the hill in the direction of the Back Harbor. When he reached the foot of that hill where the road should have been, he found that it had disappeared. The tide had risen and covered it.

It was pitch-dark, the rain was less heavy, and clouds of fog were drifting in before the wind. Seth waded on for a short distance, but soon realized that wading would be an impossibility. Then, as in despair, he was about ready to give

up the attempt, a dark object came into view beside him. It was a dory belonging to one of the lobstermen, which, at the end of its long anchor rope, had swung inshore until it floated almost over the road. Seth seized it in time to prevent collision with his knees. The thole pins were in place, and the oars laid lengthwise on its thwarts. As his hands touched the gunwale a new idea came to him.

He had intended walking the rest of the way to Eastboro, routing out the liveryman and hiring a horse and buggy with which to reach the Lights. Now he believed chance had offered him an easier and more direct method of travel. He could row up the Harbor and Slough, land close to where the *Daisy M.* lay, and walk the rest of the way in a very short time. He climbed into the dory, pulled up the anchor, and seated himself at the oars.

The bottom of the boat was two inches deep with rain water, and the thwart was dripping and cold. Seth, being already about as wet as he could be, did not mind this, but pulled with long strokes out into the harbor. The vague black shadows of the land disappeared, and in a minute he was, so far as his eyes could tell him, afloat

on a shoreless sea. He had no compass, but this did not trouble him. The wind, he knew, was blowing directly from the direction he wished to go, and he kept the dory's bow in the teeth of it. He rowed on and on. The waves, out here in the deep water, were of good size, and the spray flew as he splashed into them. He knew that he was likely to get off the course, but the Back Harbor was, except for its upper entrance, landlocked, and he could not go far astray, no matter where he might hit the shore.

The fog clouds, driven by the squalls, drifted by and passed. At rare intervals the sky was almost clear. After he had rowed for half an hour and was beginning to think he must be traveling in circles, one of these clear intervals came and, far off to the left and ahead, he saw something which caused him to utter an exclamation of joy. Two fiery eyes shone through the dark. The fog shut them in again almost immediately, but that one glance was sufficient to show that all was well at the post he had deserted. The fiery eyes were the lanterns in the Twin-Lights towers. John Brown had been equal to the emergency, and the lamps were lighted.

Seth's anxiety was relieved, but that one

glimpse made him even more eager for home. He rowed on for a short time, and then began edging in toward the invisible left-hand shore. Judging by the length of time he had been rowing, he must be close to the mouth of the Slough, where, winding through the salt marshes, it emerged into the Back Harbor.

He crept in nearer and nearer, but no shore came in sight. The fog was now so thick that he could see not more than ten feet from the boat, but if he was in the mouth of the Slough he should have grounded on the marsh bank long before. The reason that he did not, a reason which did not occur to him at the time, was that the marshes were four feet under water. Owing to the tremendous tide Pounddug Slough was now merely a continuation of the Harbor and almost as wide.

The lightkeeper began to think that he must have miscalculated his distance. He could not have rowed as far as he thought. Therefore, he again turned the dory's nose into the teeth of the wind and pulled steadily on. At intervals he stopped and listened. All he heard was the moan of distant foghorns and the whistling of the gusts in trees somewhere at his left. There

were pine groves scattered all along the bluffs on the Eastboro side, so this did not help him much except to prove that the shore was not far away. He pulled harder on the right oar. Then he stopped once more to listen.

Another blast howled through the distant trees and swept down upon him. Then, borne on the wind, he heard from somewhere ahead, and alarmingly near at hand, other sounds, voices, calls for help.

"Ahoy!" he shouted. "Ahoy there! Who is it? Where are you?"

"Help!" came the calls again—and nearer. "Help!"

"Look out!" roared Seth, peering excitedly over his shoulder into the dark. "Where are you? Look out or you'll be afoul of . . . Jumpin' Judas!"

For out of the fog loomed a bulky shape driving down upon him. He pulled frantically at the oars, but it was too late. A mast rocked against the sky, a stubby bowsprit shot over the dory, and the little boat, struck broadside on, heeled to the water's edge. Seth, springing frantically upward, seized the bowsprit and clung to it. The dory, pushed aside and half full of wa-

ter, disappeared. From the deck behind the bowsprit two voices, a man's voice and a woman's, screamed wildly.

Seth did not scream. Clinging to the reeling bowsprit, he swung up on it, edged his way to the vessel's bows and stepped upon the deck.

"For thunder sakes!" he roared angrily, "what kind of navigation's this? Where's your lights, you lubbers? What d'you mean by—Where are you anyhow? And—and what schooner's this?"

For the deck, as much as he could see of it in the dark, looked astonishingly familiar. As he stumbled aft it became more familiar still. The ropes, a combination of new and old, the new boards in the deck planking, the general arrangement of things, as familiar to him as the arrangement of furniture in the kitchen of the Lights! It could not be . . . but it was! The little schooner was his own, his hobby, his afternoon workshop—the *Daisy M.* herself. The *Daisy M.,* which he had last seen stranded and, as he supposed, hard and fast aground! The *Daisy M.* afloat, after all these years!

From the stern by the cabin hatch a man came reeling toward him, holding to the rail for

support with one hand and brandishing the other.

"Help!" cried the man wildly. "Who is it? Help us! we're drowning! We're . . . Can't you put us ashore. Please put us . . . Good Lord!"

Seth made no answer. How could he? The man was Bennie D.

And then another figure followed the first, and a woman's voice spoke pleadingly.

"Have you got a boat?" it cried. "We're adrift on this dreadful thing and . . . why, *Seth!*"

The woman was Emeline Bascom.

"Why, *Seth!*" she said again. Then the sounds of the wind and waves and the creaking and cracking of the old schooner alone broke the silence.

But Bennie D., even under the shock of such a surprise as this, did not remain silent long. His precious self was in danger.

"You put us ashore!" he shouted. "You put us ashore right off, do you hear? Don't stand there like a fool! Do something. Do you want us to drown? *Do* something!"

Seth came to life. His first speech was sharp and businesslike.

"Emeline," he said, "there's a lantern hanging up in the cabin. Go light it and fetch it to me. Hurry!"

"It's upset," was the frightened answer. "Bennie found it when we first came aboard. When we—when this awful boat started, it upset and went out."

"Never mind. Probably there's ile enough left for a spell. Go fetch it. There's matches in a box on the wall just underneath where 'twas hangin'. Don't stop to talk! Move!"

Mrs. Bascom moved. Seth turned to the "inventor."

"Come for'ard with me," he ordered. "Here! this way! for'ard! *for'ard!*"

He seized his companion by the arm and pulled him toward the bow. The frightened genius held back.

"What in time is the matter with you?" snarled the lightkeeper. "Are your feet asleep? Come!"

Bennie D. came, under compulsion. Seth half led, half dragged him to the bow, and, bending down, uncoiled a rope and put it in his hands.

"Them's the jib halliards," he explained. "Haul on 'em quick and hard as you can. If we

can h'ist the jib we can get some steerage way on her, maybe. Haul! haul till you can't haul no more. Then hang on till I come back and make fast."

He rushed back to the wheel. The tiller ropes were new, and he could trust them, fortunately. From the cabin hatchway emerged Mrs. Bascom bearing the lighted lantern.

"Good!" snapped Seth. "Now we can see what we're doin' and, if we show a glim, maybe we won't run down no more dories. You go for'ard and— No, you take this wheel and hold it just as 'tis. *Just* as 'tis; understand? I'll be back in a jiffy. What in thunder's the matter with that foolhead at the jib?"

He seized the lantern and rushed to the bow. Bennie D. had dropped the halliard and was leaning over the rail screaming for help.

Seth hoisted the jib himself, made it fast, and then turned his attention to the mutinous hand.

"Shut up!" he bellowed, catching him by the arm. "Who do you cal'late's goin' to hear you? Shut up! You come with me. I want you to pump. The old craft would do well enough if she was tight, but she's more'n likely takin' water like a sieve. You come and pump."

But Bennie had no notion of pumping. With a jerk he tore loose from the lightkeeper's grasp and ran to the stern, where he continued his howls for help.

Seth was at his heels.

"Stop that, I tell you," he commanded angrily. "It don't do no good. If you don't want to go to the bottom you'll work that pump. Don't be such a clown."

The frantic genius paid no attention. His sister-in-law left the wheel and put her hand on his shoulder. "Please, Bennie," she pleaded. "Please do as he says. He knows, and——"

Bennie D. pushed her backward with savage force. "Mind your own business," he yelled with an oath. "'Twas your foolishness got me into this." Then, leaning over the rail, he called shrilly, "He—lp! I'm drowning! Help!"

Mrs. Bascom staggered back against the wheel, which Seth had seized the instant she deserted it. "Oh!" she said, "you hurt me."

Her husband freed an arm and put it about her. "Are you much hurt, Emeline?" he asked sharply.

"No—o. No, Seth. I—I guess I ain't really hurt at all."

"Good! Then you take this wheel and hold her just so. That's it. *And don't you drop it again.* I'll attend to this feller."

His wiry fingers locked themselves in Bennie D.'s shirt collar.

"I ordered you to pump," said Seth. "Now then, you come and pump!"

"Let go!" screamed his captive. "Take your hands off me, or——"

The back of his head striking the deck put a period in the middle of his sentence. The next moment he was being dragged by the collar to the little hand pump amidships.

"Pump!" roared the lightkeeper. "Pump! or I'll break your everlastin' neck. Lively now!"

The dazed genius rose to his knees. "What—" he stammered. "Where——"

"Right there in front of you. Lively, you lubber!"

A well-directed kick helped to facilitate liveliness.

"What shall I do?" wailed Bennie D., fumbling the pump brake. "How does it go?"

"Up and down—so." Seth jerked his victim's head up and down, by way of illustration.

"Now, then," he continued, "you pump till I say quit, or I'll—I swan to man I'll make a spare tops'l out of your hide!"

He left the inventor working as he had not worked in the memory of man, and strode back to the wheel. Mrs. Bascom was clinging to the spokes for dear life.

"I—I ain't dropped it, Seth," she declared. "Truly I ain't."

"All right. You can drop it now. I'll take it myself. You set down and rest."

He took the wheel and she collapsed, breathless, against the rail. After a time she ventured to ask a question.

"Seth!" she said, "how do you know which way to steer?"

"I don't," was the reply. "All I'm tryin' to do is keep her afore it. If this no'theast wind would hold, we'd be all right, but it's dyin' fast. And the tide must be at flood, if not startin' to go out. With no wind, and no anchor, and the kind of ebb tide there'll be pretty soon—well, if we don't drift out to sea we'll be lucky. . . . Pump! pump! you son of a roustabout. If I hear you stoppin' for a second I'll come for'ard and murder you."

Bennie D., who had ventured to rest for a moment, bent his aching back to the task. Was this man-slaughtering tyrant his mild-mannered, meek brother-in-law, the creature whom he had brow-beaten so often and managed so effectively? He could not understand—but he pumped.

Perhaps Seth did not understand, either; perhaps he did not try to. Yet the explanation was simple and natural. The sea, the emergency, the danger, his own deck beneath his feet—these were like old times, here was a situation he knew how to handle. He forgot that he was a light-keeper absent from duty, forgot that one of his passengers was the wife he had run away from, and the other his bugbear, the dreaded and formidable Bennie D. He forgot all this and was again the able seaman, the Tartar skipper who, in former days, made his crews fear, respect, and swear by him.

And he reveled in his authority. Once Mrs. Bascom rose to peer over the rail.

"Emeline," he snapped, "didn't I tell you to set down and set still? Must I give orders twice? *Set down!*"

Emeline "set."

The wind died to fitful gusts. The schooner barely moved. The fog was as thick as ever. Still Seth did not lose courage. When the housekeeper ventured to murmur that she was certain they would drown, he reassured her.

"Keep your pennant mast-high, Emeline," he said cheerfully. "We ain't out at sea, that's sure and sartin. And, until we get in the breakers, we're safe enough. The old gal leaks some; she ain't as dry as a Good-Templar prayer meetin', but she's afloat. And when I'm afloat I ain't afraid, and you needn't be."

Some time after that he asked a question in his turn.

"Emeline," he said, "what in the world are you doin' here, on my schooner?"

"Your schooner, Seth? Yours? Is this dreadful—is this boat yours?"

"Yup. She's mine. I bought her just for fun a long spell ago, and I've been fussin' with her ever since. But I did it *for* fun; I never s'posed she'd take a cruise—like this. And what are you and—him—doin' on her?"

Mrs. Bascom hesitated. "It was all an accident, Seth," she explained. "This has been an awful night—and day. Bennie and I was out

ridin' together, and we took the wrong road. We got lost, and the rain was awful. We got out of the buggy to stand under some trees where 'twas drier. The horse got scared at some limbs fallin' and run off. Then it was most dark, and we got down to the shore and saw this boat. There wa'n't any water round her then. Bennie, he climbed aboard and said the cabin was dry, so we went into it to wait for the storm to let up. But it kept gettin' worse. When we came out of the cabin it was all fog like this and water everywhere. Bennie was afraid to wade, for we couldn't see the shore, so we went back into the cabin again. And then, all at once, there was a bump that knocked us both sprawlin'. The lantern went out, and when we come on deck we were afloat. It was terrible. And then—and then you came, Seth, and saved our lives."

"Humph! Maybe they ain't saved yet. . . . Emeline, where was you drivin' to?"

"Why, we was drivin' home, or thought we was."

"Home?"

"Yes, home—back to the bungalow."

"You was?"

"Yes."

A pause. Then: "Emeline, there's no use your tellin' me what ain't so. I know more than you think I do, maybe. If you was drivin' home why did you take the Denboro road?"

"The Denboro road? Why, we only went on that a ways. Then we turned off on what we thought was the road to the Lights. But it wa'n't; it must have been the other, the one that goes along by the edge of the Back Harbor and the Slough, the one that's hardly ever used. Seth," indignantly, "what do you mean by sayin' that I told you what wa'n't so? Do you think I lie?"

"No. No more than you thought I lied about that Christy critter."

"Seth, I was always sorry for that. I knew you didn't lie. At least I ought to have known you didn't. I——"

"Wait. What did you take the Denboro road at all for?"

"Why—why— Well, Seth, I'll tell you. Bennie wanted to talk to me. He had come on purpose to see me, and he wanted me to do somethin' that—that . . . Anyhow, he'd come to see me. I didn't know he was comin'. I hadn't heard from him for two years. That letter I got this—

yesterday mornin' was from him, and it most knocked me over."

"You hadn't *heard* from him? Ain't he been writin' you right along?"

"No. The fact is he left me two years ago without even sayin' good-by, and—and I thought he had gone for good. But he hadn't," with a sigh, "he hadn't. And he wanted to talk with me. That's why he took the other road—so's he'd have more time to talk, I s'pose."

"Humph! Emeline, answer me true: Wa'n't you goin' to Denboro to get—to get a divorce from me?"

"A divorce? A divorce from *you?* Seth Bascom, I never heard such——"

She rose from her seat against the rail.

"Set down," ordered her husband sharply. "You set down and keep down."

She stared, gasped, and resumed her seat. Seth gazed straight ahead into the blackness. He swallowed once or twice, and his hands tightened on the spokes of the wheel.

"That—that feller there," nodding grimly toward the groaning figure at the pumps, "told me himself that him and you had agreed to get a divorce from me—to get it right off. He give

me to understand that you expected him, 'twas all settled and that was why he'd come to Eastboro. That's what he told me this afternoon on the depot platform."

Mrs. Bascom again sprang up.

"Set down!" commanded Seth.

"I won't."

"Yes, you will. Set down." And she did.

"Seth," she cried, "did he—did Bennie tell you that? Did he? Why, I never heard such a —I never! Seth, it ain't true, not a word of it. Did you think I'd get a divorce? Me? A self-respectin' woman? And from you?"

"You turned me adrift."

"I didn't. You turned yourself adrift. I was in trouble, bound by a promise I give my dyin' husband, to give his brother a home while I had one. I didn't want to do it; I didn't want him with us—there, where we'd been so happy. But *I* couldn't say anything. *I* couldn't turn him out. And you wouldn't, you——"

She was interrupted. From beneath the *Daisy M.'s* keel came a long, scraping noise. The little schooner shook, and then lay still. The waves, no longer large, slapped her sides.

Mrs. Bascom, startled, uttered a little scream.

Bennie D., knocked to his knees, roared in fright. Seth alone was calm. Nothing, at that moment, could alarm or even surprise him.

"Humph!" he observed, "we're aground somewheres. And in the Harbor. We're safe and sound now, I cal'late. Emeline, go below where it's dry and stay there. Don't talk—go. As for you," leaving the wheel and striding toward the weary inventor, "you can stop pumpin'—unless," with a grim smile, "you like it too well to quit—and set down right where you be. Right where you be, I said! Don't you move till I say the word. *When* I say it, jump!"

He went forward, lowered the jib, and coiled the halliards. Then, lantern in hand, he seated himself in the bows. After a time he filled his pipe, lit it by the aid of the lantern, and smoked. There was silence aboard the *Daisy M.*

The wind died away altogether. The fog gradually disappeared. From somewhere not far away a church clock struck the hour. Seth heard it and smiled. Turning his head he saw in the distance the Twin-Lights burning steadily. He smiled again.

Gradually, slowly, the morning came. The

last remnant of low-hanging mist drifted away. Before the bows of the stranded schooner appeared a flat shore with a road, still partially covered by the receding tide, along its border. Fish houses and anchored dories became visible. Behind them were hills, and over them roofs and trees and steeples.

A step sounded behind the watcher in the bows. Mrs. Bascom was at his elbow.

"Why, Seth!" she cried, "why, Seth! it's Eastboro, ain't it? We're close to Eastboro."

Seth nodded. "It's Eastboro," he said. "I cal'lated we must be there or thereabouts. With that no'theast breeze to help us we couldn't do much else but fetch up at the inner end of the Back Harbor."

She laid her hand timidly on his arm.

"Seth," she whispered, "what should we have done without you? You saved our lives."

He swung about and faced her. "Emeline," he said, "we've both been awful fools. I've been the biggest one, I guess. But I've learned my lesson—I've swore off—I told you I'd prove I was a man. Do you think I've been one to-night?"

"Seth!"

"Well, do you? Or," with a gesture toward the "genius" who was beginning to take an interest in his surroundings, "do you like that kind better?"

"Seth," reproachfully, "I never liked him better. If you had——"

She was interrupted by her brother-in-law, who came swaggering toward them. With the sight of land and safety, Bennie D.'s courage returned; also, his old assurance.

"Humph!" he observed. "Well, sister, we are safe, I really believe. In spite of," with a glare at the lightkeeper, "this person's insane recklessness and brutality. Now I will take you ashore and out of his presence."

Seth rose to his feet.

"Didn't I tell you," he demanded, "not to move till I said the word? Emeline, stay right here."

Bennie D. stared at the speaker; then at his sister-in-law.

"Sister," he cried, in growing alarm, "sister, come! come! we're going ashore, I tell you. What are you waiting for?"

Seth put his arm about the lady.

"She is goin' ashore," he said. "But she's

goin' with me, and she's goin' to stay with me. Ain't you, Emeline?"

The lady looked up into his face and then down again. "If you want me, Seth," she said.

Bennie D. sprang forward. "Emeline," he shrieked, "what do you mean? Are you going to leave me? Have you forgotten——"

"She ain't forgot nothin'," broke in Seth. "But *you're* forgettin' what I told you. Will you go aft there and set down, or shall I make you?"

"But—but, Emeline—sister—have you forgotten your promise to your dying husband? To my brother? You promised to give me a home as long as you owned one."

Then Seth played his trump.

"She don't own any home," he declared triumphantly. "She sold her house, and she ain't got any home—except the one I'm goin' to give her. And if you ever dare to show your head inside of *that,* I'll—I'll heave you over both lights. If you think I'm foolin', just try and see. Now then, Emeline."

And, with his wife in his arms, Seth Atkins—Seth Atkins Bascom—*Captain* Seth Atkins Bascom—swung over the rail and waded to land.

CHAPTER XVI

THE EBB TIDE

JOHN BROWN," his long night's vigil over, extinguished the lights in the two towers, descended the iron stairs, and walked across the yard into the kitchen. His first move, after entering the house, was to ring the telephone bell and endeavor to call Eastboro. He was anxious concerning Atkins. Seth had not returned, and the substitute assistant was certain that some accident must have befallen him. The storm had been severe, but it would take more than weather to keep the lightkeeper from his post; if he was all right he would have managed to return somehow.

Brown rang the bell time and time again, but got no response. The storm had wrecked the wires, that was certain, and that means of communication was cut off. He kindled the fire in the range and tried to forget his anxiety by prepar-

ing breakfast. When it was prepared he waited a while and then sat down to a lonely meal. But he had no appetite, and, after dallying with the food on his plate, gave it up and went outside to look about him.

The first thing he looked at was the road from the village. No sign of life in that direction as far as he could see. Then he looked at the bungalow. Early as it was, a thread of blue smoke was ascending from the chimney. Did that mean that the housekeeper had returned? Or had Ruth Graham been alone all through the miserable night? Under ordinary circumstances he would have gone over and asked if all was well. He would have done that, even if Seth were at home—he was past the point where the lightkeeper or their compact could have prevented him—but he could not muster courage to go now. She must have found the note he had tucked under the door, and he was afraid to hear her answer. If it should be no, then—well, then he did not care what became of him.

He watched the bungalow for a time, hoping that she might come out—that he might at least see her—but the door did not open. Auguring all sorts of dismal things from this, he moped

gloomily back to the kitchen. He was tired and had not slept for thirty hours, but he felt no desire for bed. He could not go to bed anyway until Atkins returned—and he did not want to.

He sat down in a chair and idly picked up one of a pile of newspapers lying in the corner. They were the New York and Boston papers which the grocery boy had brought over from Eastboro, with the mail, the previous day. Seth had not even looked at them, and Brown, who seldom or never read newspapers, found that he could not do so now. He tossed them on the table and once more went out of doors. After another glance at the bungalow, he walked to the edge of the bluff and looked over.

He was astonished to see how far the tide had risen in the night. The line of seaweed and drift marking its highest point was well up the bank. Now the ebb was foaming past the end of the wharf. He looked for the lobster car, which should have been floating at its moorings, but could not see it. Either it was under the wharf or it had been swept away and was gone. And one of the dories was gone, too. No, there it was, across the cove, high and dry on the beach. If so much damage was visible from where he

stood, it was probable that a closer examination might show even more. He reëntered the kitchen, took the boathouse key from its nail—the key to Seth's wonderful purchase, the spring lock which was to keep out thieves and had so far been of no use except as a trouble-maker—and started for the wharf. As he passed the table he picked up the bundle of newspapers and took them with him. The boathouse was the repository for rubbish, old papers and magazines included, and these might as well be added to the heap. Atkins had not read this particular lot, but the substitute assistant did not think of this.

The lobster car was not under the wharf. The ropes which had moored it were broken, and the car was gone. Splinters and dents in the piles showed where it had banged and thumped in the grasp of the tide before breaking loose. And, lying flat on the wharf and peering under it, it seemed to him that the piles themselves were a trifle aslant; that the whole wharf had settled down on the outer side.

He rose and was about to go further out for another examination, when his foot struck the pile of papers he had brought with him. He picked them up, and, unlocking the boathouse door—it

stuck and required considerable effort to open it —entered the building, tossed the papers on the floor, and turned to go out. Before he could do so the door swung shut with a bang and a click.

At first he did not realize what the click meant. Not until he tried to open it did he understand. The settling of the wharf had thrown the door and its frame out of the perpendicular. That was why it stuck and opened with such reluctance. When he opened it, he had, so to speak, pushed it uphill. Its own weight had swung it back, and the spring lock—in which he had left the key—had worked exactly as the circular of directions declared it would do. He was a prisoner in that boathouse.

Even then he did not fully grasp the situation. He uttered an exclamation of impatience and tugged at the door; but it was heavy, jammed tight in its frame, and the lock was new and strong. He might as well have tried to pull up the wharf.

After a minute of fruitless effort he gave up the attempt on the door and moved about the little building, seeking other avenues of escape. The only window was a narrow affair, high up at the back, hung on hinges and fastened with a

hook and staple. He climbed up on the fish nets and empty boxes, got the window open, and thrust his head and one shoulder through the opening. That, however, was as far as he could go. A dwarf might have squeezed through that window, but not an ex-varsity athlete like Russell Brooks or a husky longshoreman like "John Brown." It was at the back, facing the mouth of the creek and the sea, and afforded a beautiful marine view, but that was all. He dropped back on the fish nets and audibly expressed his opinion of the lock and the man who had bought it.

Then he tried the door again, again gave it up, and sat down on the fish nets to think. Thinking was unsatisfactory and provoking. He gave that up, also, and, seeing a knothole in one of the boards in the landward side of his jail, knelt and applied his eye to the aperture. His only hope of freedom, apparently, lay in the arrival home of the lightkeeper. If Seth had arrived he could shout through that knothole and possibly be heard.

The knothole, however, commanded a view, not of the lighthouse buildings, but of the cove and the bungalow. The bungalow! Ruth Graham! Suddenly, and with a shock, flashed to his

mind the thought that his imprisonment, if at all prolonged, was likely to be, not a joke, but the most serious catastrophe of his life.

For Ruth Graham was going to leave the bungalow and Eastboro that very day. He had begged to see her once more, and this day was his last chance. He had written her, pleading to see her and receive his answer. If he did not see her, if Seth did not return before long and he remained where he was, a prisoner and invisible, the last chance was gone. Ruth would believe he had repented of his declaration as embodied in the fateful note, and had fled from her. She had intimated that he was a coward in not seeing his fiancée and telling her the truth. She did not like his writing that other girl and running away. Now she would believe the cowardice was inherent, because he had written her, also—and had run away. Horrible!

Through the knothole he sent a yell for rescue. Another and another. They were unheard—at least, no one emerged from the bungalow. He sprang to his feet and made another circle of the interior of the boathouse. Then he sank down upon the heap of nets and again tried to think. He must get out. He must—somehow!

The morning sunshine streamed through the little window and fell directly upon the pile of newspapers he had brought from the kitchen and thrown on the floor. His glance chanced to rest for an instant upon the topmost paper of the pile. It was a New York journal which devotes two of its inside pages to happenings in society. When he threw it down it had unfolded so that one of these pages lay uppermost. Absently, scarcely realizing that he was doing so, the substitute assistant read as follows:

"Engagement in High Life Announced. Another American Girl to Wed a Nobleman. Miss Ann Gardner Davidson to become the Baroness Hardacre."

With a shout he fell upon his knees, seized the paper and read on:

"Another contemplated matrimonial alliance between one of New York's fairest daughters and a scion of the English nobility was made public yesterday. Miss Ann Gardner Davidson, of this city, the breaking of whose engagement to Russell Agnew Brooks, son of George Agnew Brooks, the wealthy cotton broker, was the sensation of the early spring, is to marry Herbert Ainsworth-Ainsworth, Baron Hardacre, of Hardacre Towers, Surrey on Kent, England. It was said that the young lady broke off her former engagement with young Brooks because of——"

The prisoner in the boathouse read no further. Ruth Graham had said to him the day before that, in her opinion, he had treated Ann Davidson unfairly. He should have gone to her and told her of his quarrel with his father. Although he did not care for Ann, she might care for him. Might care enough to wait and . . . Wait? Why, she cared so little that, within a few months, she was ready to marry another man. And, if he owed her any debt of honor, no matter how farfetched and fantastic, it was canceled now. He was absolutely free. And he had been right all the time. He could prove it. He would show Ruth Graham that paper and . . .

His jaw set tight, and he rose from the heap of fish nets with the folded paper clinched like a club in his hand. He was going to get out of that boathouse if he had to butt a hole through its boards with his head.

Once more he climbed to the window and made an attempt to squeeze through. It was futile, of course, but this time it seemed to him that the sill and the plank to which it was attached gave a little. He put the paper between his teeth, seized the sill with both hands, braced his feet against a beam below, and jerked with all his strength.

Once—twice—three times! It was giving! It was pulling loose! He landed on his back upon the nets, sill and a foot of boarding in his hands. In exactly five seconds, the folded newspaper jammed in his trousers pocket, he swung through the opening and dropped to the narrow space between the building and the end of the wharf.

The space was a bare six inches wide. As he struck, his ankle turned under him, he staggered, tried wildly to regain his balance, and fell. As he fell he caught a glimpse of a blue-clad figure at the top of the bluff before the bungalow. Then he went under with a splash, and the eager tide had him in its grasp.

When he came to the surface and shook the water from his eyes, he was already some distance from the wharf. This, an indication of the force of the tide, should have caused him to realize his danger instantly. But it did not. His mind was intent upon the accomplishment of one thing, namely, the proving to Ruth Graham, by means of the item in the paper, that he was no longer under any possible obligation to the Davidson girl. Therefore, his sole feeling, as he came sputtering to the top of the water, was disgust at his own clumsiness. It was when he tried to turn

and swim back to the wharf that he grasped the situation as it was. He could not swim against that tide.

There was no time to consider what was best to do. The breakers were only five hundred yards off, and if he wished to live he must keep out of their clutches. He began to swim diagonally across the current, putting all his strength into each stroke. But for every foot of progress toward the calmer water he was borne a yard toward the breakers.

The tide bubbled and gurgled about him. Miniature whirlpools tugged at his legs, pulling him under. He fought nobly, setting his teeth and swearing inwardly that he would make it, he would not give up, he would not drown. But the edge of the tide rip was a long way off, and he was growing tired already. Another whirlpool sucked him down, and when he rose he shouted for help. It was an instinctive, unreasoning appeal, almost sure to be useless, for who could hear him?—but he shouted, nevertheless.

And the shout was answered. From somewhere behind him—a long, long distance, so it seemed to him—came the clear call in a woman's voice.

"All right! I'm coming. Keep on, just as you are."

He kept on, or tried to. He swam—and swam —and swam. He went under, rose, went under again, fought his way up, and kept on swimming. Through the gurgle and hiss of the water, sounding dully above the humming in his ears and the roar of the blood in his tired brain, came the clear voice again:

"Steady now! Just as you are! one more stroke! Now one more! Quick! Quick! Now! Can you get aboard?"

The wet, red side of a dory's bow pushed past his laboring shoulder. A hand clutched his shirt collar. He reached up and grasped the boat's gunwale, hung on with all his weight, threw one leg over the edge, and tumbled into the dory's bottom.

"Thanks," he panted, his eyes shut. "That —was—about the closest call I—ever had. Hey? Why! *Ruth!*"

She was panting, also, but she was not looking at him. She was rowing with all her might, and gazing fearfully over her shoulder. "Are you strong enough to help me row?" she asked breathlessly. "We must head her away from

here, out of this tide. And I'm afraid that I can't do it alone."

He raised his head and looked over the rail. The breakers were alarmingly close. He scrambled to the thwart, pushed her aside and seized the oars. She resisted.

"Only one," she gasped. "I can manage the other."

So, each with an oar, they fought the tide, and won—but by the narrowest of margins. The dory edged into stiller and shoaler water, crept out of the eddying channel over the flat where the depth was but a scant four feet, turned almost by inches, and, at last, slid up on the sandy beach below the bungalow. The girl sat bowed over the handle of her oar, her breast heaving. She said nothing. Her companion likewise said nothing. Staggering, he stepped over the side, walked a few feet up the beach, and then tumbled in an unconscious heap on the sand.

He was not unconscious long, being a healthy and robust young fellow. His first thought, upon opening his eyes, was that he must close them again as quickly as possible because he wanted the dream to continue. To lie with one's head

in the lap of an angel, while that angel strokes your forehead and cries over you and begs you for her sake not to die, is too precious a delusion to lose. But the opening of one's eyes is a mistake under such circumstances, and he had made it. The angel's next remark was entirely unromantic and practical.

"Are you better?" she asked. "You're all right now, aren't you?"

Her patient's reply was also a question, and irrelevant.

"*Do* you care?" he asked faintly.

"Are you better?" she asked in return.

"Did you get my note? The note I put under the door?"

"Answer me. Are you all right again?"

"You answer *me*. Did you get my note?"

"Yes. . . . Don't try to get up. You're not strong enough yet. You must wait here while I go and get you some——"

"Don't go!" He almost shouted it. "If—if you do I'll—I'll—I think I'm going to faint again."

"Oh, no, you're not. And I must go and get you some brandy or something. Stay just where you are."

"Ruth Graham, if you go away now, I'll go with you, if I have to crawl. Maybe I can't walk, but I swear I'll crawl after you on my hands and knees unless you answer my question. *Do* you care enough for me to wait?"

She looked out at the little bay, at the narrow, wicked tide race, at the breakers beyond. Then she looked down again at him.

"Yes," she said. . . . "*Oh,* are you going to faint again? Don't! Please don't!"

Russell Agnew Brooks, the late "John Brown," opened his eyes. "I am not going to faint," he observed. "I was merely trying to realize that I was fully conscious."

Some time after this—hours and minutes do not count in paradise—he remembered the item in the paper.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "I had something to show you. I'm afraid I've lost it. Oh, no! here it is."

He extracted from his trousers pocket the water soaked lump that had been the New York newspaper. The page containing the sensational announcement of the engagement in high life was quite undecipherable. Being on the outside of

the folded paper, it had rubbed to a pulpy blur. However, he told her about it, and she agreed that his judgment of the character of the future Baroness Hardacre had been absolutely correct.

"You were very wise," she said sagely.

"Not so wise as I've become since," he asserted with decision. Then he added, with a rather rueful smile, "I'm afraid, dear, people won't say as much for you, when they know."

"I'm satisfied."

"You may have to wait all those years—and years—you spoke of."

"I will."

But she did not have to. For, at that moment, the miracle of wisdom beside her sat up and pointed to the wet newspaper lying on the sand at her feet.

"Has my happiness affected my wits?" he demanded. "Or does salt water bring on delusions? Aren't those my initials?"

He was pointing to a paragraph in the "Personals" column of the New York paper. This, being on one of the inner pages, had remained comparatively dry and could be read. The particular "Personal" to which he pointed was this:

"R. A. B." Wherever you are. This is to certify that I hereby acknowledge that you have been absolutely correct in the A. D. matter; witness news elsewhere. I was a fool, and I apologize publicly. Incidentally I need a head like yours in my business. Come back. Partnership awaiting you. Come back; and marry anybody or nobody as you see fit.

"FATHER."

CHAPTER XVII

WOMAN-HATERS

"BUT what," asked Ruth, as they entered the bungalow together, "has happened to Mr. Atkins, do you think? You say he went away yesterday noon and you haven't seen him or even heard from him since. I should think he would be afraid to leave the lights for so long a time. Has he ever done it before?"

"No. And I'm certain he would not have done it this time of his own accord. If he could have gotten back last night he would, storm or no storm."

"But last night was pretty bad. And," quite seriously, "of course he knew that you were here, and so everything would be all right."

"Oh, certainly," with sarcasm, "he would know that, of course. So long as I am on deck, why come back at all? I'm afraid Atkins doesn't share your faith in my transcendent ability, dear."

"Well," Miss Graham tossed her head, "I imagine he knew he could trust you to attend to his old lighthouses."

"Perhaps. If so, his faith has developed wonderfully. He never has trusted me even to light the lanterns. No, I'm afraid something has happened—some accident. If the telephone was in working order I could soon find out. As it is, I can only wait and try not to worry. By the way, is your housekeeper—Mrs. What's-her-name—all serene after her wet afternoon? When did she return?"

"She hasn't returned. I expected her last evening—she said she would be back before dark—but she didn't come. That didn't trouble me; the storm was so severe that I suppose she stayed in the village overnight."

"So you were alone all through the gale. I wondered if you were; I was tremendously anxious about you. And you weren't afraid? Did you sleep?"

"Not much. You see," she smiled oddly, "I received a letter before I retired, and it was such an important—and surprising—communication that I couldn't go to sleep at once."

"A letter? A letter last night? Who—

What? You don't mean my letter? The one I put under your door? You didn't get *that* last night!"

"Oh, yes, I did."

"But how? The bungalow was as dark as a tomb. There wasn't a light anywhere. I made sure of that before I came over."

"I know. I put the light out, but I was sitting by the window in the dark, looking out at the storm. Then I saw some one coming up the hill, and it was you."

"Then you saw me push it under the door?"

"Yes. What made you stay on the step so long after you had pushed it under?"

"Me? . . . Oh," hastily, "I wanted to make sure it was—er—under. And you found it and read it—then?"

"Of course. I couldn't imagine what it could be, and I was curious, naturally."

"Ruth!"

"I was."

"Nonsense! You knew what it must be. Surely you did. Now, truly, didn't you? Didn't you, dear?"

"Why should I? . . . Oh, your sleeve is wet. You're soaking wet from head to foot."

"Well, I presume that was to be expected. This water out here is remarkably damp, you know, and I was in it for some time. I should have been in it yet if it hadn't been for you."

"Don't!" with a shudder, "don't speak of it. When I saw you fall into that tide I . . . But there! you mustn't stay here another moment. Go home and put on dry things. Go at once!"

"Dry things be hanged! I'm going to stay right here—and look at you."

"You're not. Besides, I am wet, too. And I haven't had my breakfast."

"Haven't you? Neither have I." He forgot that he had attempted to have one. "But I don't care," he added recklessly. Then, with a flash of inspiration, "Why can't we breakfast together? Invite me, please."

"No, I shall not. At least, not until you go back and change your clothes."

"To hear is to obey. 'I go, but I return,' as the fellow in the play observes. I'll be back in just fifteen minutes."

He was back in twelve, and, as to make the long detour about the marshes would, he felt then, be a wicked waste of time and the marshes themselves were covered with puddles left by the

tide, his "dry things" were far from dry when he arrived. But she did not notice, and he was too happy to care, so it was all right. They got breakfast together, and if the coffee had boiled too long and the eggs not long enough, that was all right, also.

They sat at opposite sides of the little table, and he needed frequent reminding that eating was supposed to be the business on hand. They talked of his father and of Ann Davidson—whom Ruth declared was to be pitied—of the wonderful coincidence that that particular paper, the one containing the "Personal" and the "Engagement in High Life" item, should have been on top of the pile in the boathouse, and—of other things. Occasionally the talk lapsed, and the substitute assistant merely looked, looked and smiled vacuously. When this happened Miss Graham smiled, also, and blushed. Neither of them thought of looking out of the window.

If they had not been so preoccupied, if they had looked out of that window, they would have seen a horse and buggy approaching over the dunes. Seth and Mrs. Bascom were on the buggy seat, and the lightkeeper was driving with one hand. The equipage had been hired at the East-

boro livery stable. Joshua was undergoing repairs and enjoying a much-needed rest at the blacksmith shop in the village.

As they drew near the lights, Seth sighed contentedly.

"Well, Emeline," he observed, "here we be, safe and sound. Home again! Yes, sir, by jiminy crimps, *home!* And you ain't goin' to Boston to-day, neither."

Mrs. Bascom, the practical, moved toward the edge of the seat.

"Take your arm away, Seth," she cautioned. "They'll see you."

"Who'll see me? What do I care who sees me? Ain't a man got a right to put his arm around his own wife, I'd like to know?"

"Humph! Well, all right. I can stand it if you can. Only I cal'late your young Brown man is in for somethin' of a shock, that's all. *He* don't know that I'm your wife."

Seth removed his arm. His expression changed.

"That's so," he admitted. "He will be set back three or four rows, won't he?"

"I shouldn't wonder. He'll think your woman-hate has had a relapse, I guess."

The lightkeeper looked trouble; then he nodded grimly.

" His ain't what you'd call a desp'rate case," he declared. " Judgin' by what I've seen in the cove for the last month, he's gettin' better of it fast. I ain't no worse than he is, by time! . . . Wonder where he is! This place looks deader'n the doleful tombs."

He hitched the horse to the back fence and assisted his wife to alight from the buggy. They entered the kitchen. No one was there, and Seth's hurried search of the other rooms resulted in finding them untenanted likewise.

" Maybe he's out in one of the lights," he said. " Wait here, Emeline, and I'll go see."

But she would not wait. " I'm goin' right over to the bungalow," she said. " I'm worried about Miss Ruth. She was alone all last night, and I sha'n't rest easy till I know nothin's happened to her. You can come when you find your young man. You and me have got somethin' to tell 'em, and we might as well get the tellin' done as soon as possible. Nothin's ever gained by putting off a mean job. Unless, of course," she added, looking at him out of the corners of her eyes, " you want

to back out, Seth. It ain't too late even now, you know."

He stared at her. "Back out!" he repeated; "back out! Emeline Bascom, what are you talkin' about? You go to that bungalow and go in a hurry. Don't stop to talk! go! Who's runnin' this craft? Who's the man in this family—you or me?"

She laughed. "You seem to be, Seth," she answered, "just now."

"I am. I've been a consider'ble spell learnin' how to be, but I've learned. You trot right along."

Brown was in neither of the light towers, and Seth began to be worried about him. He descended to the yard and stood there, wondering what on earth could have happened. Then, looking across the cove, he became aware that his wife was standing on the edge of the bluff, making signals with both hands.

He opened his mouth to shout a question, but she frantically signaled for silence. Then she beckoned. He ran down the path at full speed. She met him at the other side of the cove.

"Come here!" she whispered. "Don't say a word, but just come—and look."

He followed her, crept close to the bungalow window and peeped in. His helper, "John Brown," and Miss Ruth Graham were seated at the table. Also the substitute assistant was leaning across that table with the young lady's hand in his; the pair were entirely oblivious of anything in the world except each other.

A few moments later a thunderous knock shook the bungalow door. The knock was not answered immediately; therefore, Seth opened the door himself. Miss Graham and the lightkeeper's helper were standing some distance apart; they gazed speechlessly at the couple who now entered the room.

"Well," observed Seth, with sarcasm, "anybody got anything to say? You," turning to the young man, "seems to me you ought to say *somethin'*. Considerin' a little agreement you and me had, I should imagine I was entitled to some triflin' explanation. What are you doin' over here—with *her?* Brown——"

The young gentleman came to himself with a start. He walked across to where Miss Graham was standing, and once more took her hand.

"My name is not Brown," he said firmly. "It

"He crept close to the bungalow window and peeped in."

is Brooks; and this is the young lady I am to marry."

He naturally expected his superior to be surprised. As a matter of fact, he was the surprised party. Seth reached out, drew the bungalow housekeeper toward him, and put his arm about her waist. Then he smiled; and the smile was expressive of pride, triumph, and satisfaction absolute.

"*Atkins!*" gasped Brooks.

"My name ain't Atkins," was the astonishing reply; "it's Bascom. And this," indicating by a tightening of his arm the blushing person at his side, "is the lady *I* married over five year ago."

After the stories had been told, after both sides had told theirs and explained and been exclaimed over and congratulated, after the very last question had been asked and answered, Brown—or Brooks—asked one more.

"But this other fellow," he queried, "this brother-in-law— By George, it is perfectly marvelous, this whole business!—where is he? What has become of him?"

Seth chuckled. "Bennie D.?" he said. "Well, Bennie D. is leavin' Eastboro on the

noon train. I paid his fare and give him fifty dollars to boot. He's goin' somewhere, but he ain't sartin where. If you asked me, I should say that, in the end, he'd most likely have to go where he's never been afore, so far's I ever heard —that's to work. Now—seein' as the important business has been talked over and settled—maybe you'll tell me about the lights, and how you got along last night."

But the lighthouse subject was destined to be postponed for a few minutes. The person in whose care the Lights had been left during the past twenty hours or so looked at the speaker, then at the other persons present, and suddenly began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Miss Graham. "Why, Russell, what is it?"

Russell Agnew Brooks, alias "John Brown," ex-substitute assistant at Eastboro Twin-Lights, sank into a chair, shaking from head to heel.

"It is hysterics," cried Ruth, hastening to his side. "No wonder, poor dear, considering what he has been through. Hush, Russell! don't, you frighten me. What *is* it?"

Her fiancé waved a reassuring hand. "It—it's all right," he gasped. "I was just laughing

at . . . Oh," pointing an unsteady finger at the lightkeeper, "ask him; he knows."

"Ask him?" repeated the bewildered young lady. "Why, Mr. Atkins—Bascom, I mean—what. . . ."

And then Seth began to laugh. Leaning against the doorpost, he at first chuckled and then roared.

"Seth!" cried his wife. "Seth, you old idiot! Why, I never see two such loons in my life! Seth, answer me! What are you two laughin' at?"

Seth Atkins Bascom wiped the tears from his eyes. "I cal'late," he panted, "I rather guess—Ho, ho!—I rather guess we're both laughin' at woman-haters."

(1)

THE END

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